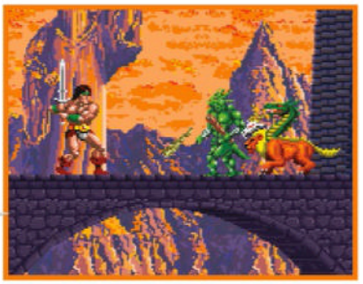
OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER



ULTIMATE GUIDE: RASTAN

THE BRAWNY CONAN RIFF THAT SLEW THE ARCADE COMPETITION

THE MAKING OF TINHEAD

RICHARD LEMARCHAND GETS US UP TO SPEED WITH HIS TAKE ON SONIC

AMSTRAD CPC 464

THE MUST-HAVE GAMES OF THE ICONIC 8-BIT

FACTOR

JULIAN EGGEBRECHT REVISITS HIS STUDIO'S ESSENTIAL GAMES

ALSO INSIDE

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY
CYGNI: ALL GUNS BLAZING
SUPER SMASH TV
HYPERSCAN
HOMEBREW
WIZBALL

THE MAKING OF SONIC GENERATIONS

TAKASHI IIZUKA ON CRAFTING THE DUAL-PLAY PLATFORMER AND ADDING SHADOW TO SEGA'S SHINY NEW REMASTER

THE MAKING OF RIVEN

BEHIND THE SCENES OF MYST'S AMBITIOUS SEQUEL

ULTIMATE GUIDE: X-OUT

REVISIT RAINBOW ARTS' CULT UNDERWATER SHOOT-'EM-UP

FUTURE
LOAD 265

IN THE CHAIR: MIKE TUCKER

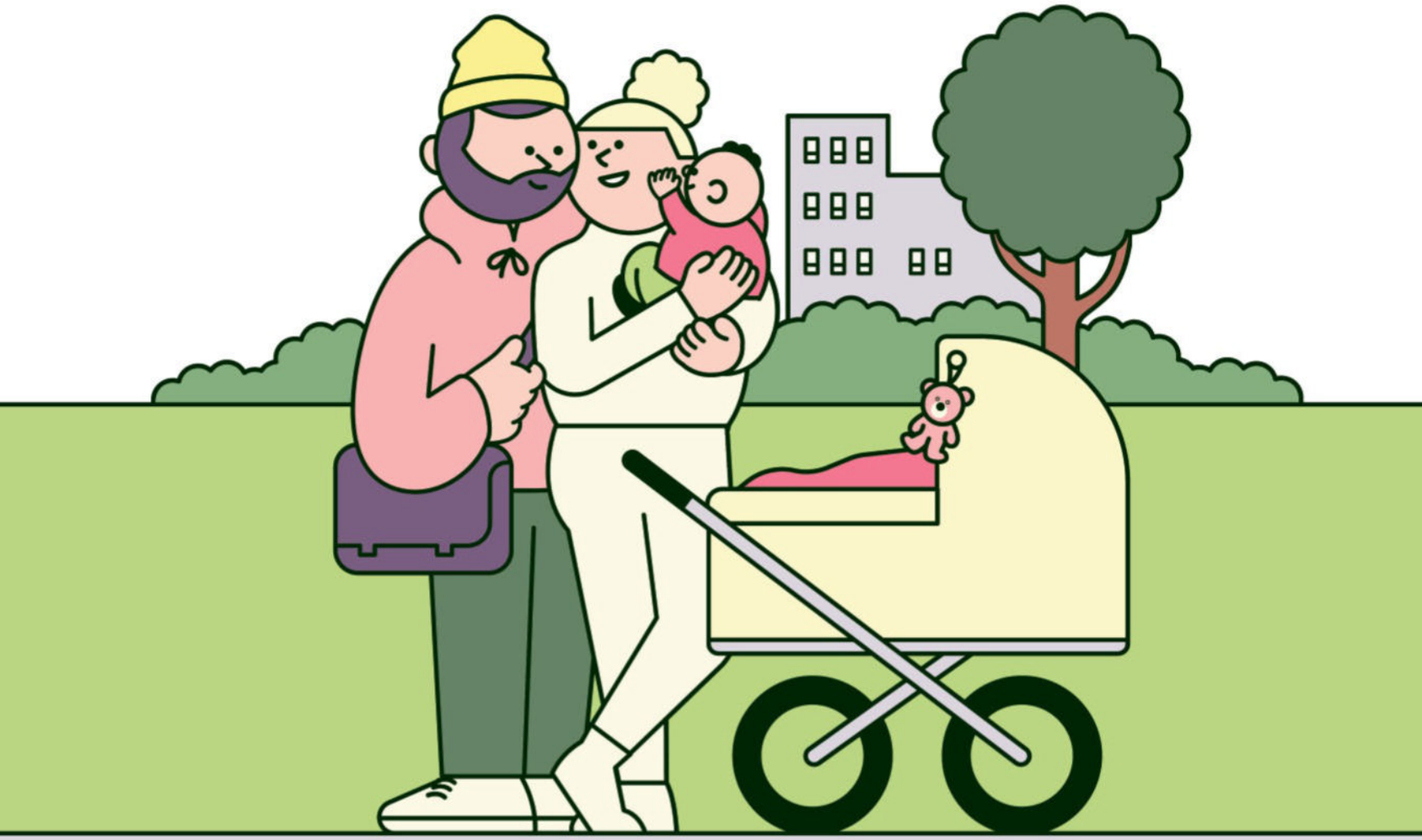
HOW A PLAYTESTING CAREER LED TO XENO CRISIS

THE MAKING OF PROJECT EDEN

FROM MAKING TOMB RAIDER TO PUSHING PS2 TECH

Advertisement

WE'VE GOT THE OPTIONS. YOU MAKE THE CHOICE.



GO. COMPARE

Car, home and travel insurance plus broadband, breakdown cover and more.

Get more info or compare quotes for a range of products at Go.Compare.

THE RETROBATES

WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE SONIC CHARACTER?

DARRAN JONES

I'm going to have to pick Metal Sonic because his debut game made me desperately want to own a Mega-CD.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Retro Racing 2*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

Tails, because he saved me a good number of times from inglorious deaths.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Baldur's Gate III* (still! Damn it's big)
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

The angsty teenager in me is drawn to Shadow, not least because his music is typically right up my alley, but picking him would be controversy for the sake of it. It's Sonic, obviously.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *UFO 50*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Dr Robotnik is a great villain, he puts so much effort into defeating Sonic, not like those lazy villains that just send henchmen, minions and offspring to do it… looking at you Bowser.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

I like Knuckles for his mechanics. OK, he's slower than Sonic and can't jump as high, but his gliding and wall climbing are really cool moves.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Colin McRae Rally*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

PAUL DRURY

I liked Dr Robotnik for his unabashed approach to facial hair.
Expertise: Ancient coin-ops
Currently playing: *HERO*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

GRAEME MASON

Dr Robotnik. He's just misunderstood and has a similar hairstyle to me.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Duck Detective: The Secret Salami*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

ANDREW FISHER

Dr Robotnik – it's always amusing to see his numerous machines fail.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *UFO 50*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

Robotnik – always root for the underdog.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Star Wars Outlaws*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

LOADING...

I'm always impressed with the unwavering popularity of Sonic The Hedgehog. He's a genuinely interesting character who has successfully invaded TV screens, cinema and even comics. He's certainly had his share of weak games over the years, but even that hasn't stopped his enduring appeal, if anything it has simply reinforced it (just look at the Sonic Cycle meme). Sonic's games have obviously evolved over the years and it resulted in two distinct styles of gameplay, which was successfully captured in *Sonic Generations*.

It blended the mechanics of Sonic's old-school 2D adventures with those found in his 3D outings and proved a huge success for Sega. It's a pleasure then to speak to Takashi Iizuka about the game's interesting development and how Sega is updating it for current systems with the inclusion of new levels and Shadow The Hedgehog in *Sonic X Shadow Generations*.

Worry not though, for if you're not a fan of the blue speedster, we've plenty more to entice you. Richard Lemarchand talks us through *Tinhead*, his own answer to Sega's blue blur, we navigate *Riven* with director Richard Vander Wende, battle through the many stages of *Rastan*, chat to Julian Eggebrecht about the games of Factor 5 and learn how Mike Tucker went from playtesting games like *Carmageddon* to creating the excellent *Xeno Crisis*. Oh, and check out our Christmas subs offer on page 26.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

CONTENTS

>> Load 265 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

6 **Main News**
This year's Tokyo Game Show had plenty of interesting retro-related games to look forward to

8 **Iain Lee**
This month Iain has been considering treating himself to a rather extravagant gift he saw on Facebook Marketplace

10 **Mr Biffo**
Paul is feeling nostalgic and decides to pour one out for those games that he feels are largely forgotten

12 **A Moment With**
The modder Voultar tells us about his modding journey and his excellent new SNES modification

14 **Back To The Noughties**
It's April 2008 and Nick is looking at the latest console exclusives, while reporting on his usual world news

REVIVALS

16 **Wizball**
Darran recalls the year he was hoping to get Sensible Software's interesting shooter for his Amstrad CPC 464

42 **Alien Syndrome**
Some games you grow up to love. Nick explains how that happened with Sega's Master System conversion

58 **Super Smash TV**
There's a lot of reasons to love the SNES' joypad, but there's one element of it that sometimes caused Darran pain

78 **BursTrick Wake Boarding!!**
It's rare to see extreme sports games on the shelves nowadays. Nick goes back to a time when they were plentiful

92 **One Piece Grand Battle: Swan Colosseum**
Nick makes a case for this entertaining Wonder Swan brawler

112 **The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay**
Darran's had a lot of awkward situations in his life, but at least this one proved rather memorable

FEATURED

28 **The Making Of: Fire Truck**
Behind the scenes of the early arcade game

36 **The Retro Gamer Guide To: Amstrad CPC 464**
Darran highlights the best games for Amstrad's 8-bit micro

44 **Ultimate Guide: X-Out**
We take an exhaustive look at this excellent underwater shmup

64 **Classic Moments: It Came From The Desert**
Hopefully you're not scared of ants...

72 **Peripheral Vision: Sharp Shooter**
Nick investigates this lightgun Xbox blaster from Joytech

74 **The Making Of: Project Eden**
Gavin Rummery looks back at the *Tomb Raider* team's ambitious adventure

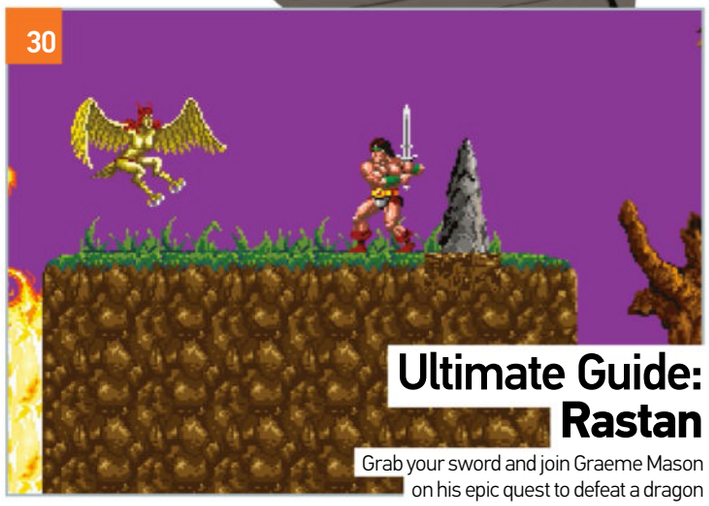
80 **Retro Inspired: CYGNI: All Guns Blazing**
Will Freeman interviews the brothers behind this epic modern shmup

84 **Hardware Heaven: HyperScan**
Meet the gaming device that failed to entice the tweens of its generation

86 **In The Chair: Mike Tucker**
The cofounder of Bitmap Bureau looks back at his fascinating career

FEATURED

The Making Of Sonic Generations
Sonic Team veteran Takashi Iizuka explains the origins of Sega's 2011 platformer and why Shadow is the focus of its new remaster



Ultimate Guide: Rastan
Grab your sword and join Graeme Mason on his epic quest to defeat a dragon

Don't forget to follow us online for all your latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag

Retro Gamer Magazine @RetroGamerMag retrogamer@futurenet.com

SAVE UP TO 40% SUBSCRIPTION
SEE PAGE 26

66

The Making Of: Riven

Discover how a member of the Disney hit *Aladdin* directed *Myst*'s ambitious sequel

60

The Making Of: Tinhead

REVIEWS

94 UFO 50

96 Evercade: Multi-Game Cartridges

96 The Legend Of Zelda: Echoes Of Wisdom

96 The Game Boy Encyclopedia

96 Cash Cow DX

ESSENTIALS

26 **Subscriptions**
More mind-boggling that witnessing two Sonics in a single videogame

98 **Homebrew**
Andrew Fisher is here to guide you through another jam-packed month

102 **Hot Topic: Celebrating Factor 5**
The team pay tribute to the games of the German developer

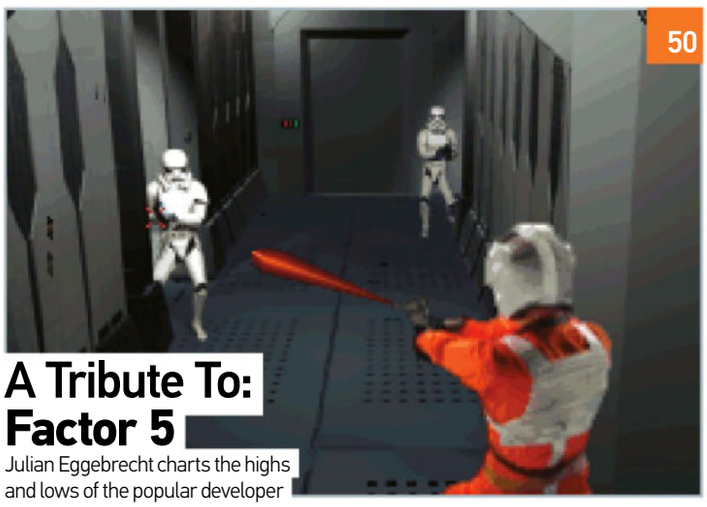
104 **Collector's Corner**
Faith Johnson talks to a collector who loves the N64 as much as Darran does

106 **My Retro Life**
David Crookes wants to introduce his daughter to gaming, but where to start?

108 **Mailbag**
Keep those letters coming, they cheer us up no end

111 **Next Month**
Can you guess which featured game will make our cover?

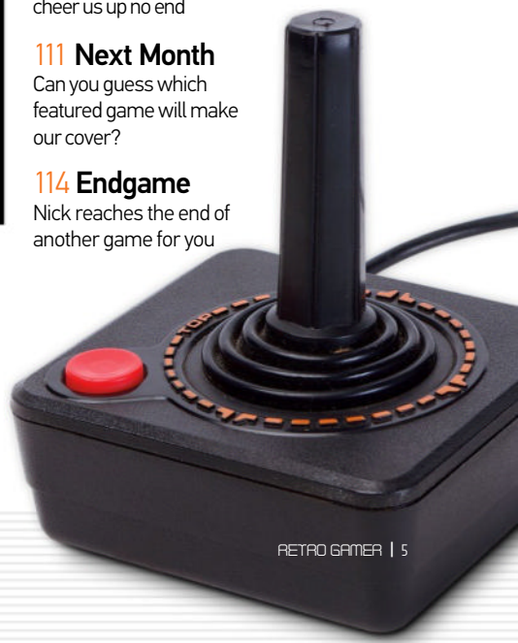
114 **Endgame**
Nick reaches the end of another game for you



50

A Tribute To: Factor 5

Julian Eggebrecht charts the highs and lows of the popular developer



EASTERN PROMISE

Plenty of classic franchises could be found at the Tokyo Game Show

» [PlayStation 5] After the disappointment of the recent HD collection, Konami looks like it's going to deliver the goods with its remake of *Snake Eater*.

CONTENTS

6 EASTERN PROMISE
The Tokyo Game Show had lots of games for retro fans to enjoy as Darran discovered

8 IAIN LEE
A bizarre advert on Facebook Marketplace has had Iain reminiscing about flight simulators

10 MR BIFFO
Are you a fan of *Spec Ops: The Line*? Paul is and he's decided it needs to be celebrated this month

12 A MOMENT WITH
Nick chats to Voultar about his excellent new SNES Edge-Enhancer modification

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick continues to barrel his way through 2008 and has landed in April. What will he find there?

» [Switch] Konami's incoming *Suikoden* collection represents excellent value for money. The originals cost a small fortune now.

Microsoft came out swinging at this year's Tokyo Game Show with an obvious push to penetrate the Japanese market. Xbox consoles have been notorious for their lack of Japanese RPGs in the past, but a collaboration with Square Enix means a bunch of classics will be heading to the system. The popular *Final Fantasy Pixel Remaster* series consisting of the first six games are now available to play on Xbox One and Xbox Series S/X, while *Legends Of Mana* and *Trials Of Mana* can both be played on Game Pass. Admittedly, all three games are currently available on other systems, but having the *Mana* games on Game Pass may entice gamers to sign up to the service.

Other RPGs Microsoft pushed included *Atelier Yumia: The Alchemist Of Memories & The Envisioned Land*, a brief, but detailed look at the incoming HD release of *Suikoden 1* and *2*, and more information on Square Enix's remake of *Dragon Quest III*. We're particularly excited about *Suikoden* which features brand-new backgrounds, numerous quality-of-life improvements and a streamlined interface. Microsoft also used the show to reveal that *Starcraft Remastered* and *StarCraft II: Campaign Collection* would be available on Game Pass from 4 November. And while we're discussing Game Pass, *We Love Katamari REROLL + Royal Reverie* has just been added as well.

Although Microsoft kicked off its show with a new trailer for *Metal Gear Delta: Snake Eater*, a look at the game's mechanics could be found over at Konami's booth and it's looking very ambitious indeed. In fact we wouldn't be surprised if it gets pushed back to 2025 so that the team can apply some additional polish. Doing that will also allow breathing room for Bloober Team's remake of *Silent Hill 2*, which was also at the show and was recently released (reviewed next issue).

There's certainly been a lot of controversy around the look of the incoming remake, but we're quietly confident it's going to be a solid companion piece to the original survival horror classic.

Konami wasn't the only Japanese publisher with a significant presence at the show. Sony was there for the first time since the pandemic and while it obviously focussed on its incoming PlayStation 5 Pro and newer games like the recently released *Astro Bot* and Hideo Kojima's incoming *Death Stranding 2*, it still found time to show off the latest games in long-running franchises like Koei Tecmo's *Dynasty Warriors: Origins*, *Capcom's Monster Hunter Wilds* and *Sonic X Shadow Generations* (which you can read more about on page 24).

Speaking of Capcom, its own online show largely showed known games, including *Street Fighter 6*, its two new fighting compilations, the latest *Ace Attorney* collection and lots of in-depth information about *Monster Hunter Wilds*. It also used the program to announce a bizarre collaboration with Fender

» [PC] *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* is one of our favourite 2D fighters and *City Of The Wolves* is looking like a worthy sequel.

to celebrate *Monster Hunter*'s 20th anniversary by unveiling the Rathalos Telecaster. Equally strange was Rathalos Prime, a new figure to celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Transformers*.

SNK is extremely confident about the incoming release of *Fatal Fury: City Of The Wolves*, as most of its own show was focussed on the game. To be fair, it's looking excellent and SNK is promising cross-platform support, rollback netcode and even the ability to battle against AI-generated opponents if that's your thing. We love the aesthetic look of the game and it seems like SNK has been tweaking *Garou*'s mechanics to make it accessible to new players of the series, while keeping long-time fans interested. SNK also revealed that *Street Fighter*'s Ken and Chun-Li would be appearing in the game via its season pass in addition to other, unannounced characters, although they won't be appearing until summer and winter 2025 respectively.

One pleasing aspect of the show was a large number of indie releases, many of which are bound to appeal to fans of classic games. *Neon Blood* is an intriguing-looking action adventure with a distinctive 2D-HD aesthetic and a cyberpunk theme, while *Super Alloy Crush* reminds us of the *Mega Man* series thanks to its detailed pixel art and brash tunes. *Threads Of Time* is a glorious-looking old-school RPG, while *Shrine's Legacy* is an RPG that looks like a lost SNES game.

» [PC] *Super Alloy Crush* looks absolutely phenomenal. Hopefully it will play as good as it looks.

» [PlayStation 4] *Final Fantasy Pixel Remaster* has been on the PS4 since 2021, but Microsoft still made a lot of noise about its recent Xbox debut.

> "One pleasing aspect of the show was a large number of indie releases"

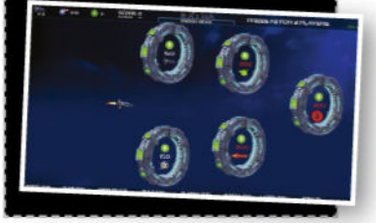
Before we wrap up it's worth mentioning that Atari has released another extensive piece of DLC for *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*. *The Wider World Of Atari* will add 19 extra games to the burgeoning collection, including various versions of *Berzerk*, *Red Baron*, *Super Bug*, *Sky Diver*, *Off The Wall*, *Stellar Track*, *Submarine Commander* and *Steeplechase*. Additionally, the DLC will include various new documentaries, including one on Evelyn Seto who created Atari's iconic logo. But that's not all. A second DLC pack called *The First Console War* will add additional games, including those for the Intellivision, which Atari now owns. Both DLC packs will be included in the expanded physical release that will appear in November.

CHRIS SERLE PASSES

The family of Chris Serle announced that he passed away on 16 September at the age of 81. Chris was a popular BBC broadcaster throughout the Eighties and worked on shows such as *That's Life*, *Monkey Business* and *Windmill*. Readers will remember him best as one of the presenters of *The Computer Programme*, which would have introduced many of us to the world of computers. Our thoughts go out to Chris' family and friends.

PROJECT X RETURNS

Well this came out of nowhere! *Project X: Light Years* started off life as a spiritual successor to Team17's popular Amiga shmup, but is now an official entry in the series. Although it only passed its £5,000 goal target by a few thousand pounds, its developer Marcin Krupinski is confident of doing the series justice, while Team17 will handle promotion for the game and offer support to ensure it's as polished as possible. We can't wait!



Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

May I see your boring passes?

I was just scrolling through Facebook Marketplace and a flight simulator popped up for sale. Not a game, an actual sit-in-a-cockpit flight simulator that proper soldiers might use to, you know, learn how to fly. I'm looking at it now. It's listed as "A10 Fighter Jet Simulator (THE TANK BUSTER)". It's only £10,500. I cannot tell you how tempted I am to cash in this month's **Retro Gamer** paycheck and buy it.

It's an odd thing to see listed on there amongst the free hi-fi equipment. Well, free until you click on the link, and it then says "open to sensible offers". I'll make you a sensible offer – my boot up your jacksie if you keep listing things as free when clearly you want lots of money for them. I do love Facebook Marketplace. I sold a cheap guitar on there for a fiver once. I got some very stroppy messages from a bloke when I refused to drive 15 miles to deliver it. It was a fiver! I'm not also going to bring it to your door. Who do you think I am? Yodel? Probably not the best example of a reliable delivery service, but you get the point.

I've tried computer-based flight sims throughout the years, but they've never really connected. I suppose the last one I tried was *747 Flight Simulator* on the BBC, so we're talking over 40 years ago. I know for a fact the technology has improved. Remember *Microsoft Flight Sim*? Comparatively recently everyone was posting videos of themselves flying over their houses. My friend David sent me a video of him flying over a local lay-by on the A41 where adults meet at night to… er… play board games. Is that euphemistic enough? *747*, *Nightflite* and all the others in the early Eighties were unfathomable. Once I'd stopped giggling over the prolific use of flaps, I didn't have a clue what to do. Too many buttons, incredibly detailed and dull instructions – these games were not the dopamine hits my nine-year-old ADHD brain required and I would give up in frustration very quickly.

747 was an anomaly in my collection because it wasn't a hooky tape-to-tape copy off my mates, we had paid actual money for this in a shop. That meant I was duty bound to keep trying it, however impossible it was to play. On the rare occasions I managed to take off, I didn't have a clue what to do then. Where do you go? I ended up flying around for a bit before trying to find the runway I had just left and attempt to land. Of course I never managed it. Did anyone? I just smashed the plane into the ground however hard I tried.

I've heard tales of gamers flying from LHR to JFK in real-time on these things. I now understand there must be a real sense of satisfaction out of it, but what do you do? Sit there for the whole seven hours? Pee in a Tizer bottle? ✱

> "I've tried computer-based flight sims throughout the years, but they've never really connected"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

WELCOME TO THE ROUGHNECKS!

STARSHIP TROOPERS EXTERMINATION

EVERYONE FIGHTS! NO ONE QUITS.

DO YOUR PART!

www.starshiptroopersextermination.com

TRI STAR a Sony Company

PS5 XBOX SERIES X|S PC OFFWORLD KNIGHTS PEAK

Starship Troopers ™ & ©2024 TriStar Pictures, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Published by Knights Peak Interactive - A division of MY.GAMES B.V. and Offworld Industries Ltd. Game software excluding TriStar Pictures, Inc. elements: ©2024 Offworld Industries Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Offworld Industries® and the Offworld logo are both registered Canadian trademarks. This trailer is protected by Canadian, U.S. and International copyright laws. "PS" and "PS5" are registered trademarks or trademarks of Sony Interactive Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Xbox Sphere mark, the Series X logo, Series S logo, Series XIS logo, Xbox One, Xbox Series X, Xbox Series S, and Xbox Series XIS are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies. Subject to change. www.knightspeak.com

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

> "Spec Ops: The Line really deserves to be remembered more than it has been"

Gone, but not forgotten

What's the biggest miss in gaming history? I'm not talking about the games that flopped because they deserved to, but those that deserved to do better.

The first that jumps to mind is 2006's *Okami*. Stunningly beautiful to look at, with a hand-drawn traditional Japanese art style, it just came too late in the PS2's life cycle at a time when players had already locked eyes onto the PS3 and Wii. It might've received acclaim across the board, but somehow never found an audience. It has since been re-released a couple of times, yet somehow remains remembered as a near-flawless masterpiece that barely anybody played.

Then there's the GameCube's *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*. Nintendo had set itself up as a family friendly company, and though things had gone a little more mature over the course of the N64's lifespan, its audience seemingly still wasn't ready for dark, psychological horror. Even so, *Resident Evil* this was not.

As your character in *ED* (an unfortunate abbreviation, but also somehow appropriate) lost their grip on their sanity, so the game itself seemed to lose its shizz. The fourth wall between game and player broke down entirely – playing tricks like turning down the volume on the TV, or showing fake error messages. It might've been too much nonsense for some, but it's one of few games to have made me laugh out loud, just because of how devious it was.

Mirror's Edge is one of my favourite games of all time. Though it fared better than *Eternal Darkness* – not commercially, but the concept was considered strong enough to warrant a mishandled sequel – it just didn't resonate with people. I guess a first-person game which focussed on parkour over combat just didn't resonate. Which is a shame, because few games have given me a literal high like *Mirror's Edge*; the rush from chaining a bunch of moves was better than flying.

Spec Ops: The Line – released in 2012 – really deserves to be remembered more than it has been. [Agreed – Ed] It tried to do something different in a crowded military shooter genre, taking cues from *Heart Of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*.

Though its duck-and-shoot combat was solid, its genius lay in how it explored themes around the psychological impact of war on the individual soldier. Set in a Dubai that had been part-swallowed by sandstorms, as the player progressed the imagery became ever darker. Like *Eternal Darkness* it might've been too cerebral for those more used to mindless shooting, but it felt like a necessary counterpoint to so many games that choose instead to glorify war. A real lost gem of a game.

I'm sure many a developer – or, more accurately, games publisher money person – has looked at these games and decided it's not worth taking similar risks, leading to an increased homogenisation of the games market. However, all four were bolder, more imaginative and more creative than pretty much everything else that was released around the same time. For that reason, at the very least they deserve the best room in the retirement home. ✱

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

THE BRAIN TUMOUR CHARITY

A CURE CAN'T WAIT

EVERY 46 MINUTES SOMEONE IS DIAGNOSED WITH A BRAIN TUMOUR.

Work with us to accelerate a cure

Brain tumours affect more than 11,000 people every year and survival rates are among the lowest of all cancers. We need your support to help us get closer to defeating brain tumours.

Text DEFEAT5 to 70507 to donate £5, please help us to fi nd a cure.

thebraintumourcharity.org

© The Brain Tumour Charity 2020. Registered Charity in England and Wales (1150054) and Scotland (SC045081)

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

» Can you tell that Voultar has a lot of love for the SNES?

Voultar

How the well-known modder is making your SNES look better than ever

If you've spent any time looking into modding retro consoles in recent years, you'll undoubtedly have come across Voultar. As well as providing instructional videos and streams, Voultar designs custom mod kits which are sold via voultar.com, and you can follow his work via @Voultar on Twitter and YouTube. We caught up with him to find out about his modding journey so far, as well as the brand-new SNES Edge-Enhancer video mod.

How did you first get into console modding?

Back in 1999, I often hung around a mom and pop video rental store. The store had a back room where they would 'chip' PlayStation systems for customers. The smell of solder and flux permeated the store in the after hours and I loved it. Modding of any sort was incredibly underground and taboo, I knew it was the life for me then!

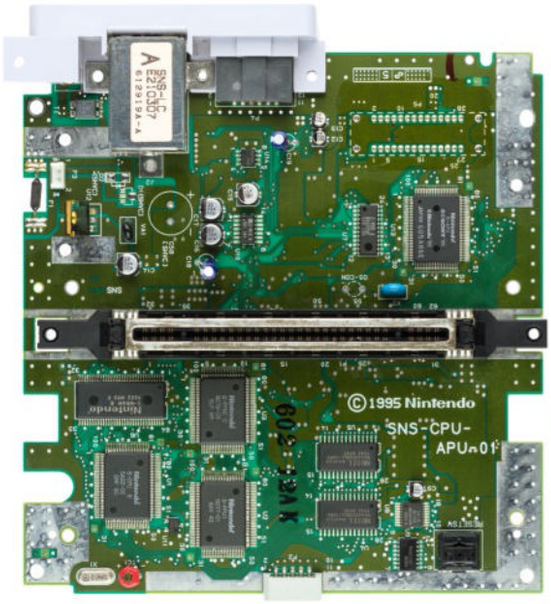
What motivated you to start designing your own mods?

Even just ten short years ago, quality 'DIY' mod kits were few and far between. I wanted to help people get into this hobby, so I set a goal to change the landscape and face of modding by creating professional, robust modifications that are reasonably well designed, and offering thorough, in-depth video tutorials and education to anyone wanting to learn. I took the skills from my professional life as a systems engineer and embarked on this amazing journey, designing hardware for videogames! It has been both a blast and an honour to impart my knowledge to people and help them reach their own goals while also learning things from them in return. It's empowering to learn new skills and it's what keeps me at this!

> "I absolutely love 16-bit RPGs and I absolutely hate 'reproduction'"
> **VOULTAR**

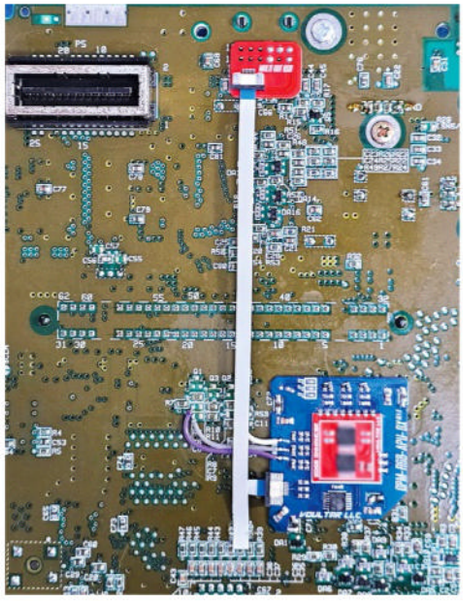
The SNES Super Stacker, which allows for translation patches to be installed in original cartridges, is an interesting design. How did it come about?

I absolutely *love* 16-bit RPGs and I absolutely hate 'reproduction' or 'fake' cartridges because they just feel fake! It cheapens the experience for me. So, I set a design goal to come up with a hardware design that would allow me to dump my own personal Super Famicom cartridges, patch the data, and then write the patched file back to the original cartridge without doing any cutting, hacking, or anything that's irreversible. From those design

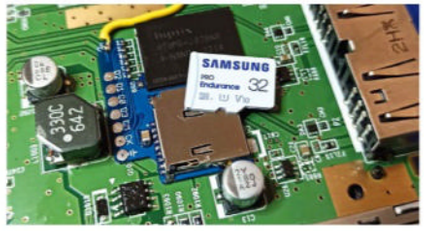


» The vertically oriented PPU2 chip below the cartridge slot is to blame for soft SNES video output.

» This photo shows the Edge-Enhancer installed in a SNES, ready for action.



» Installing a Super Stacker allows for ROM patches on original cartridges, but is fully reversible.



» The NAND-AID, designed with Wii U community assistance, essentially replaces the failing NAND component completely.

» The blurred standard SNES output is shown on the left, while the right shows the Edge-Enhancer's effects.

» Failing NAND memory is a problem in not only the Wii U, but other more recent consoles.

goals, the Super Stacker was born and it's filled a large need for both myself and others who love authentic cartridges.

The Wii U NAND Recovery Kit is another one of your designs. Were you surprised to have had to create it, given that the console isn't that old?

Unfortunately, failing NAND memory is affecting more than the Wii U! Certain Xbox 360 units that possess a similar memory configuration are suffering from a very similar problem as well as Nintendo 3DS hardware, including cartridges! Fortunately for the sake of the Wii U, there's a group of very kind and thoughtful developers who did all of the hard work, figuring out and identifying the problem. I played only a very small part and just lent a helping hand. People make fun of me for saying this, but I believe that the Wii U will be looked upon as the Dreamcast is today over the next ten years. The Switch wouldn't have the library of first-party titles that it does without all of those lazy Wii U ports! Yes, I said it!

Your latest mod is the SNES Edge-Enhancer – why was this a project that you wanted to tackle?

The SNES Edge-Enhancer is a labour of love that I've been committed to since COVID. It's my final love letter to the SNES hardware as I don't intend to design any new hardware modifications for the console. Over the past several years, many people have tried to correct a problem that's inherent to the SNES that makes the hardware output a very smeared or blurry video output. I stand on shoulders, and if weren't for good friends of mine such as Ste Kulov of HD-Retrovision, Mike Chi of RetroTink, and the silicon decapping genius Furrtek, what I've developed wouldn't be nearly as good as it is in its current form.

What's the technical reason behind the soft video output of 2-chip SNES consoles?

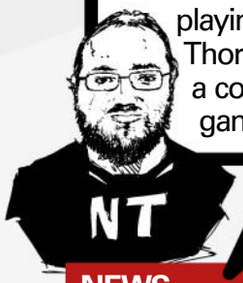
Once we de-capped the SNES' PPU2 (the chip responsible for outputting analogue video), we were able to analyse the silicon and make some determinations. The SNES 2-chip utilises a string resistor DAC, and for each channel, or RGB colour, there are 3 bits going to 4 mini-DACs with different reference voltages. This design results in a lot of parasitic and stray distortions which negatively affects how quickly the SNES' video DAC can transition between different colours. For example, going from black to white may result in a 'grey' tone that smears across because the SNES' DAC simply isn't fast enough to transition properly.

How does the SNES Edge-Enhancer remedy the issue?

The SNES Edge-Enhancer isn't a 'sharpening' filter as has existed for the SNES for the past decade. Rather, it's a video recovery appliance, working alongside the DAC to 'turbo-charge' operations happening inside the PPU2 chip which effectively results in a video output that's on par and comparable to that of the coveted 1-CHIP SNES that was released in limited numbers at the tail-end of the SNES' life. However, it's not just about 'sharp' pixels. Just as much work has gone into cleaning the video signal up and removing all of the dreaded and notorious video distortions that plague the SNES. It's a complete package that will not only improve the RGB output, but S-video and composite video, too.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

APRIL 2008 – There's gunfire in Vegas, Kratos is on a killing spree in Greece, interplanetary empires are warring in space and in the Green Hill Zone, Sonic is… playing tennis? Nick Thorpe is your guide to a confusing month in gaming history



» [Xbox 360] They weren't kidding, we struggled hard to find an interesting-looking screenshot of this.

NEWS APRIL 2008

The BBC reported on 1 April that scientists at Newcastle University had used human skin cells and eggs taken from cow ovaries to create part-human, part-animal hybrid embryos, which survived for up to three days. The move drew condemnation from the Catholic Church, but in May MPs would vote 336-176 to allow such experiments to continue.

On 5 April, Charlton Heston passed away at the age of 84 due to pneumonia. The Hollywood star had won Best Actor at the Oscars in 1959 for his role in *Ben-Hur*, and starred in films including, *Planet Of The Apes* and *Soylent Green*. He was also politically active, supporting the civil rights movement in the Sixties and becoming president of the National Rifle Association in the Nineties.

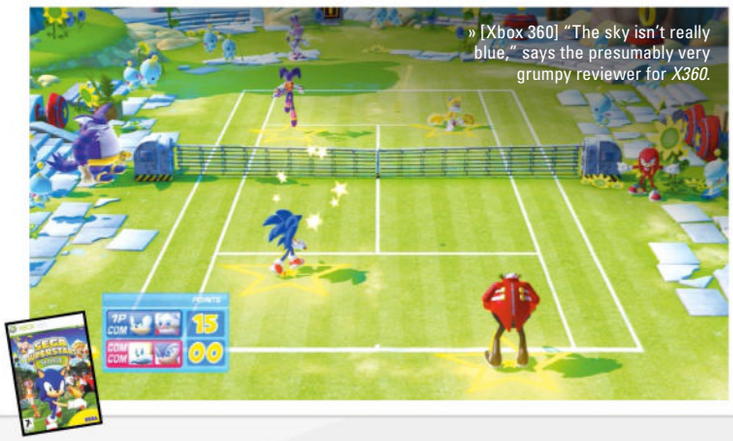
TV presenter Mark Speight, known for shows such as *SMart* and *Scratchy & Co*, was declared missing on 8 April. Speight's fiancée Natasha Collins had passed away in January, and his disappearance came days after the coroner in her case recorded a verdict of death by misadventure. His body was found five days later, with the coroner recording a verdict of suicide, opining that "he could not contemplate life without her".

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 2008

First-person shooter fanatics didn't have to gamble with their hard-earned cash this month, as the critics felt *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas 2* was a winner on the HD consoles. Scores included 9/10 from *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, 8/10 from *Official PlayStation Magazine*, 4/5 from *360*, 78% from *Play* and 7/10 each from *X360*, *games™* and *Edge*. *OXM* felt that it "isn't a massive leap forward for the series" but was "the best *Rainbow Six* and the best Xbox 360 squad shooter yet". By contrast, *games™* felt that "the strong multiplayer carries it, as does the better-than-most gunplay" but complained of a solo campaign that was "all corridors and parking garages, empty convention centres and bland penthouse apartments".

Sega Superstars Tennis was also being served up across various formats, and scored 89% in *Official Nintendo Magazine*, 8.1/10 in *nRevolution*, 7/10 in both *Edge* and *OXM*, 3/5 in *360* and 5/10 in *X360*. "It's colourful, it's packed with retro references to satisfy the geek in us, it's great fun in multiplayer and, most importantly, the gameplay is satisfying and addictive," said *ONM*'s review. *X360* compared it to Sega's other notable tennis game, saying that it "has hardly any of the variety of tactics that you can use in *Virtua Tennis*" and requested that, "If you do find yourself working your way through all the different cups eventually beating the computer and earning all sorts of trophies and prizes then please slap yourself."

Really though, this was a month for exclusive games. For Xbox 360 owners, that meant *Lost Odyssey* – a new RPG from *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi. In an 8/10 review, *games™* cautioned readers that "the game's adherence to the basics of the genre will be off-putting for some" but also advised that "some will doubtless find *Lost Odyssey* among the most emotionally affecting videogame experiences of their lives". *OXM* also gave it 8/10, while *Edge* scored it 7/10 as "so much attention has been lavished on the story and its presentation that, when interactivity rears its head, it's done almost begrudgingly".



» [Xbox 360] "The sky isn't really blue," says the presumably very grumpy reviewer for *X360*.

On the Wii, the highly anticipated party fighter *Super Smash Bros Brawl* was subject to scrutiny in its Japanese form. The game earned a whopping 9.5/10 from *nRevolution*, which said that the graphics were "up there with *Mario Galaxy* as the best the console has to offer" and that it was "confident in its ability to entertain, and simply wants to provide the best experience possible". *Edge* gave it 9/10 and declared it to be "so comprehensive that there's nowhere for this series to go without radical change".

PS3 owners didn't get any exclusive love worth mentioning this month, but Kratos made his handheld debut in *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus*. *OPM* bestowed a 10/10 rating upon the prequel adventure and called it "the best game on PSP" commending the "sharp, deliberate and rewarding" combat and declaring that "the sense of scale is retained even on the small screen". *Edge* also felt that the game offered "furious, often scintillating hack-and-slash" but complained of the game "limping repetitively to a close" in its second half, ultimately giving it 7/10.

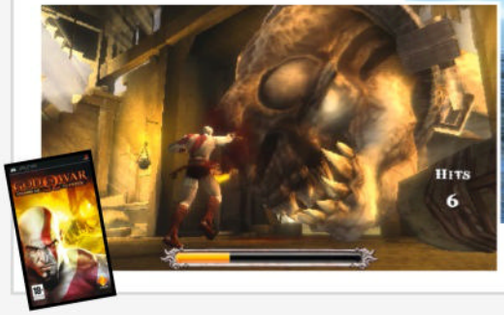
Even PS2 owners had an exclusive game to boast about in the form of Vanillaware's *Odin Sphere*. *OPM* gave the action RPG 8/10 and praised the "lush visuals" while *Play* gave it 82% and noted that "combat is triumphantly varied, and intelligently thought-out". *Puzzle Quest: Challenge Of The Warlords* earned 8/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* for "slotting an addictive puzzle challenge into a role-playing game structure". It also appeared on the PC and was awarded 87% by *PC Gamer*.

Speaking of the PC, *Total PC Gaming* gave *Sins Of A Solar Empire* 9/10, calling it "a brilliantly executed space-strategy game that brings new innovations to classic play". *PC Gamer* and *Edge* also enjoyed it, giving it 84% and 8/10 respectively, with the latter declaring it "a unique achievement, unifying real-time battle and empirical strategy where others have only managed to offer them as separate components". Also on PC, *Audiosurf* scored 8/10 in *games™* and 85% in *PC Gamer*, which felt that its trick of generating levels from MP3 audio offered, "A bottomless tub of instant gaming snack."

What's in store next month? The sound of furious swearing suggests Blue Shells – join us again to see where they land. ✱

» [PC] In space, no one can hear you explode. Mostly because they are also exploding.

» [Wii] After an infamous April Fool's gag, Sonic finally joined the cast of *Super Smash Bros*.



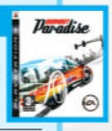
» [PSP] Ultimately, *OPM*'s review was closer to the consensus on *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus*.

» [Xbox 360] Here's *Lost Odyssey*. It all looks very shiny, but we're not sure what's happening.

CHARTS

APRIL 2008

PLAYSTATION 3



1 – **Burnout Paradise** (EA)
2 – **Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** (Activision)
3 – **Assassin's Creed** (Ubisoft)
4 – **Uncharted: Drake's Fortune** (Sony)
5 – **FIFA 08** (EA)

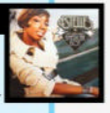
WII

1 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
2 – **Game Party** (Midway)
3 – **Carnival: Funfair Games** (2K Games)
4 – **Sonic And The Secret Rings** (Sega)
5 – **Super Mario Galaxy** (Nintendo)

DS

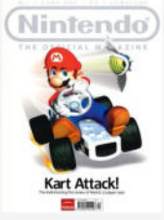
1 – **Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games** (Sega)
2 – **Dr Kawashima's Brain Training** (Nintendo)
3 – **Professor Kageyama's Maths Training** (Nintendo)
4 – **More Brain Training From Dr Kawashima** (Nintendo)
5 – **New Super Mario Bros** (Nintendo)

MUSIC



1 – **American Boy** (Estelle feat. Kanye West)
2 – **Black & Gold** (Sam Sparro)
3 – **Low** (Flo Rida feat. T-Pain)
4 – **4 Minutes** (Madonna feat. Justin Timberlake)
5 – **Touch My Body** (Mariah Carey)

THIS MONTH IN...



Official Nintendo Magazine

"Great, original games are not getting the attention they deserve," says *ONM*, concerned about the public's spending habits. "This could lead towards a situation where companies don't take risks any more and stick to clones."

Edge

Street Fighter IV is coming to arcades, and it's already turning heads. "Playable builds drew queues of up to 90 at a time, a feat unmatched by any of its showfloor competitors in any genre," says *Edge*, reporting on the annual AOU trade show in Tokyo.

Play

"Sony's risky strategy of bundling Blu-ray players with PS3s has paid off" says *Play*, after Toshiba officially abandons its HD-DVD format. "Blu-ray's success means the electronics giant now stands to make billions from the royalties generated by HD-disc sales."

003550
015

Wizball

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

» RETROREVIVAL

» AMSTRAD CPC » 1987 » SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

If you lived in the Eighties like I did, you probably couldn't afford many videogames. It's also highly likely that most of your future gaming purchases were decided by what you would read in magazines, which in my case was *Amstrad Action*.

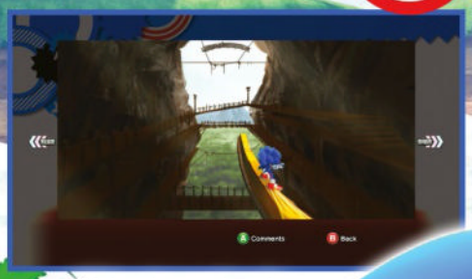
While I never really cared for the techy stuff that the magazine covered, it did have an excellent reviews section and anything that was awarded Mastergame status instantly got my interest. One such release that I had my eye on was Ocean's *Wizball*, which sounded like my sort of game. I loved the idea of restoring the game's world to its once vibrant colours, and the fact that it had shoot-'em-up elements only added to its appeal.

I simply couldn't afford it though, so I crossed my fingers and hoped that my mum or my grandparents would get the hint that I wanted it for Christmas. When I found out that it was one of the games included on *The Magnificent Seven*, I thought my chances of owning it would be even higher. But Christmas 1987 came and went and so did my chance of getting *Wizball*.

I completely forgot about Ocean's game and wasn't reminded of it until I unwrapped *The Magnificent Seven* for my 15th birthday. Granted, the games on it weren't exactly new by then, but I didn't care. I finally had *Wizball* and a bunch of other great games too. I excitedly loaded up the game and sat down to play – and I couldn't get on with it at all.

I couldn't get my head around it at first and despised the bouncing mechanic which caused me no end of frustration. Disappointed, I turned it off and loaded up *Head Over Heels* instead. After re-reading the *Amstrad Action* review, I gave Sensible's game another try and I'm so glad I did. It finally clicked and quickly became one of my favourite Amstrad games, even if *Amstrad Action* failed to mention that it wasn't a patch on the C64 version. But that's a story for another time…

THE MAKING OF SONIC GENERATIONS



» [PC] An early concept image for the modernised Green Hill, featuring grind rails through a canyon.

» [PC] Plenty of attention was paid to properly updating 2D designs for 3D space.

TAKASHI IIZUKA
■ Creative director at Sonic Team.

THEY SAY THAT IF YOU WANT A JOB DONE WELL YOU'VE GOT TO DO IT YOURSELF, BUT WHEN ALL OF TIME AND SPACE ARE IN DANGER, ONE SONIC JUST ISN'T ENOUGH. TAKASHI IIZUKA EXPLAINS THE CREATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY GAME THAT CELEBRATED SONIC'S PAST WHILE PAVING THE WAY FOR HIS FUTURE

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

It's no secret that major birthdays can bring about a mild feeling of crisis – many of us will have spent some time reflecting on what we've done with our lives, and the things we wished we'd done. It turns out that videogame characters aren't immune from this either, and you only need to look at Sonic to see that. Sonic's tenth anniversary in 2001 was a time of great uncertainty for Sega, and while *Sonic Adventure 2* was a good game to celebrate the occasion, it served as a swan song for both the Dreamcast and the company's time in the console market. Five years later, *Sonic The Hedgehog* (commonly known as *Sonic 06*) arrived on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 and received a notably negative critical reception, marred by myriad technical issues and a setting and story that were perceived as out of character for the series. A botched Game Boy Advance conversion of the original Mega Drive game also launched in 2006, solidifying Sonic's 15th anniversary as an occasion to forget.

Sonic's 20th anniversary broke the cycle with *Sonic Generations*, a game in which Sonic teams up with his past self in a time-travelling adventure that mixes 2D and 3D platforming – but before we discuss that game, we have to return to the past ourselves to examine its heritage. In the wake of *Sonic 06*, it was clear that the *Sonic* series needed a change of pace and Sonic Team was evidently aware of that, as the 2008 release *Sonic Unleashed* overhauled the structure of 3D *Sonic* games. Ditching the movement model that had characterised the series since *Sonic Adventure* launched ten years prior, *Sonic Unleashed* adapted the gameplay of the DS hit *Sonic Rush* into 3D, with a Boost mechanic that encouraged constant forward motion. As Sonic ran through the stages, they would automatically switch from a standard forward-looking view to side-on sections that evoked memories of the classics.

While *Sonic Unleashed* was received more warmly than its predecessor and represented a definite step in the right direction, opinions were still mixed. "*Sonic Unleashed* also featured two distinct styles of gameplay. Third-person, combat-focussed action games were popular at that time, and we wanted to explore how that could be represented in a *Sonic* title while reflecting on iconic Sonic moments that players love," says Takashi Iizuka, Sonic Team's creative director. That experimentation resulted in the creation of Sonic's stretchy-limbed Werehog form, whose stages were more akin to games like *Devil May Cry* and *Ninja Gaiden*. "Of course, we're always listening to fan feedback, and we took learnings to refine *Sonic* gameplay for more recent titles." That feedback clearly informed the direction of the next round of *Sonic* games, all of which kept platform gameplay at their core.

> "SONIC GENERATIONS WAS MEANT TO HIGHLIGHT ALL OF SONIC'S HISTORY SO IT'S IMPORTANT WE REPRESENTED EACH TITLE TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY"
> **TAKASHI IIZUKA**

Following the completion of *Sonic Unleashed*, Sonic Team began development of *Sonic Colours* for the Wii and *Sonic Generations* for the Xbox 360 and PS3 – both of which would build on the Boost style of *Sonic Unleashed*. *Sonic Colours* arrived in 2010 and focussed exclusively on Sonic as a playable character, with new Wisp power-ups to expand his range of abilities. The game was a critical and commercial success and while the side-on sections dominated gameplay, it showed more of what the Boost style could offer to the series. The Dimps-developed 2D platformer *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I* courted the nostalgia market in 2010, receiving favourable reviews and strong sales. However, heavily invested Sonic fans disliked the use of Sonic's modern design and mechanics, as well as oddities in the game's physics model.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM
- **PLATFORM:** XBOX 360, PS3, PC
- **RELEASED:** 2011
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

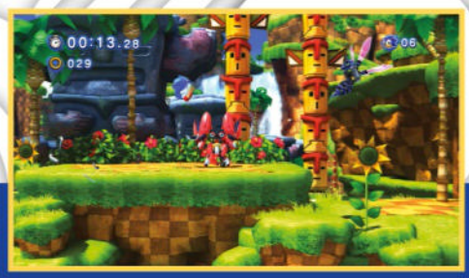
SONIC ADVENTURE 2
PLATFORM: DREAMCAST, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2001

SONIC COLOURS (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: WII, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2010

SONIC FRONTIERS
PLATFORM: VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2022

» [PC] Tails tries to avoid getting dragged away, as the Time Eater attacks Sonic's birthday party.

» [PC] The two Sonics meet for the first time, comparing their similarities and differences in the mirror.



» [PC] Green Hill is familiar, but far more visually dense than it was in its original 16-bit incarnation.

So finally, we come to *Sonic Generations*, which reprises the *Sonic Unleashed* concept of including two forms of Sonic. The game begins with Sonic's friends throwing him a surprise birthday party, complete with a chilli dog as a gift, only for a mysterious, shadowy creature to attack and drag the whole crew into a white void. Upon his arrival, Sonic finds locations from his past drained of their life and colour – as well as his friends in the same state. Soon enough, Sonic catches up with Tails and both of their past selves, as they try to right the crazy situation.

"From the very start of development, *Sonic Generations* was always intended as the ultimate celebration of Sonic and the franchise's highest moments from its past in one fun package," says Iizuka. "Combining both Modern and Classic Sonic made sense as we were honouring Sonic's holistic history which includes both designs." The pudgier, silent incarnation of Sonic from the Mega Drive days would feature exclusively in 2.5D stages and kept classic moves like the Spin Dash, while the long-legged, green-eyed version we know today would explore 3D stages like those of *Sonic Unleashed*, retaining his full repertoire of moves including sliding, wall jumps, stomps, homing attacks and of course the Boost.

> "WE WANTED THE FEELING OF NOSTALGIA TO COME THROUGH IN THE ENTRANCE SCENES OF THE BOSS AND RIVAL CHARACTERS"
> **TAKASHI IIZUKA**

Sonic Team consulted widely to find out which stages those should be. "Since Sonic's 20th birthday was such a big moment for the team, we wanted to make sure everyone at Sega had a say. We asked everyone in Japan, America and Europe who was working on *Sonic* games at the time to nominate their favourite levels, then we did more research with dedicated Sonic fans, and we made a shortlist," Iizuka recalls. Nine stages were chosen in total, split across three eras that broadly represented the Mega Drive games, the Dreamcast games and the more modern games. The inclusion of stages from *Sonic 06* and *Sonic Unleashed* surprised some fans, who hadn't expected Sonic Team to highlight games that were negatively received. "*Sonic Generations* was meant to highlight all of Sonic's history so it's important we represented each title to the best of our ability," says Iizuka.

For Green Hill, Chemical Plant and Sky Sanctuary, this meant finding ways to update them in full 3D. "It was important to respect and pay tribute to the original beauty and fun gameplay elements of each stage we included, and it was equally important to preserve the design motifs of the Classic levels (checkered patterns in Green Hill, blue pipe routes in Chemical Plant, etc) when modernising the textures and graphics, so the worlds all felt correct in the 3D space," Iizuka recalls. "There was a lot of trial and error as we explored how to do this before deciding on the final look, but once we secured the 3D design language and look of Green Hill, the rest of the stage designs all sort of fell into place."

Iizuka continues to explain the level design philosophy behind the Mega Drive stages, saying, "We put a lot of effort into preserving the original 2D side-view level design as this was critical in evoking a feeling of nostalgia from the essence of Classic *Sonic* titles. Then, we added new level design and gameplay elements when the stage turned into a 3D world-view to create fresh, new, and exciting game moments." When you play the game, it's easy to see this in action – just in Green Hill, Classic Sonic's Act 1 has plenty of S-shaped tunnels and swinging platforms, while Act 2 sees Modern Sonic grinding through a flooded cave and stomping through wooden bridges to access secret paths.

However, the majority of the stages in *Sonic Generations* originate from Sonic's 3D games. "For stages pulled from the Modern games, we added 2D side-view gameplay mechanics to bring a fresh, new gaming experience to the more recent levels at the time," Iizuka tells us. City Escape is a great example of this, with Act 1 incorporating the GUN truck as a persistent antagonist that will cut across Sonic's path,

BRING A BUDDY

THE TWO SONICS MAY BE THE STARS, BUT HIS FRIENDS HAVE THEIR MOMENTS IN THE CHALLENGE ACTS

KNUCKLES: HORDE OF ENEMIES

Sonic's rough and ready rival is always up for a bit of friendly competition, and in this case that means a race through Green Hill Zone to a remix of *Super Sonic Racing*. Just watch out for the Motobugs and Buzz Bombers, which are way bigger than usual.

TAILS: TOXIC SKIES

Getting a lift from the friendly fox has always been a good way to keep Sonic out of harm's way, but it's not an option for most of *Sonic Generations*. However, it's a necessity in this tricky stretch of Chemical Plant Zone, so make the most of him.

AMY: TAKING THE LEAP TOGETHER!

Sonic may despair of his clingy companion sometimes – quite often, actually – but she's the perfect partner for this mission. Using her Piko Piko Hammer, she can launch Sonic high into the air with a perfectly timed swing, allowing him access to areas he couldn't otherwise reach.

ROUGE: THE TEMPTRESS

The game instructs you to "have Rouge take out enemies using her wiles" and the jewel thief certainly does that, shooting a beam of hearts at Eggman's Egg Pawns that makes them go all heart-eyed and stunned. Why did he program them to be vulnerable to those feminine charms?

» [PC] Chemical Plant's undulating paths provide a real thrill ride in Modern Sonic's 3D stage.

destroying platforms as it goes. "Since using Boost is a primary way of having fun in Modern Sonic gameplay, we focussed on making that the focus of the 3D stages and providing great boost moments there," Iizuka adds, and moments like running down the skyscraper in Speed Highway transitioned effortlessly to that style.

Choosing to represent the entire series also meant the inclusion of stages from *Sonic Unleashed* and *Sonic Colours*, recent games that shared the Boost style. Was there any difficulty in ensuring that the *Sonic Generations* versions of the stages were sufficiently different to the originals? "Yes, there was," Iizuka confirms. "At the time, *Sonic Generations* was being developed right across from where *Sonic Colours* was being developed, so it was important that even though both teams were developing the same stages, the stages had to incorporate different level design to make sense for their different game concepts. Because the concept for *Sonic Generations* was already solidified, there wasn't any hesitation once we got into development."

Just as Classic and Modern Sonic diverged in gameplay styles, the musical themes for their stages did the same, with Act 1 themes tending towards more electronic musical styles, and Act 2 themes typically incorporating string instruments. The new arrangements and remixes

VECTOR: PICK UP THE BEAT

In this mission, Sonic has to play a bit of tennis with the crocodile behind the turntables, using the homing attack to return a musical note to him repeatedly during a fairly lengthy rally. This is generally considered to be one of the trickier Challenge Acts in *Sonic Generations*.

3D BLAST FROM THE PAST

HOW SONIC'S 3DS DEBUT DIFFERED FROM ITS CONSOLE COUNTERPARTS

One of the aspects of the *Sonic* series that fans have come to appreciate over the years is the creation of bespoke games for handheld platforms, which often vary quite significantly from the hedgehog's home-console adventures. That tradition stayed intact for *Sonic Generations*. "Most of the assets created for the PlayStation and Xbox versions of *Sonic Generations* could not be used at all when developing the 3DS version of the game, so we focussed on different stages for the 3DS version, and really made two different titles celebrating the 20th anniversary of *Sonic*," Takashi Iizuka explains.

As with the *Sonic* games for Game Boy Advance and DS, the 3DS version of *Sonic Generations* was a collaborative effort with the external developer Dimps. "The team worked very closely with Dimps from concept development and co-development of the game to the end. I presented the core game concept, stages to create and the story, while Dimps worked on all the level design and development for the 3DS platform," Iizuka tells us. "I travelled a lot to the Osaka studio during development to make sure the 3DS game they were working on had the same *Generations* feel to the game being made in parallel in Tokyo by the Sonic Team."

In gameplay terms, the contrast between Classic Sonic and Modern Sonic stages is less stark on the 3DS. "We wanted to create the best experience for players on 3DS hardware, so from the beginning, we didn't add the 3D world-view perspective gameplay into the concept," says Iizuka. "However, we did want to expand on the 2D side-view gameplay by having platforming action that was true to Classic Sonic combined with game design and gameplay that would reflect the fun of Modern Sonic as well." This meant adding moves like boosting, sliding and the homing attack for Modern Sonic.

The main reason to seek out the 3DS version of *Sonic Generations* is that while it follows the same story beats as the home-console versions, it draws different stages and bosses from past games – for example, Mushroom Hill Zone instead of Sky Sanctuary Zone, and Big Arms instead of the Death Egg Robot. "We also wanted to do something unique for the handheld version, so we included stages from *Sonic Rush* only on the 3DS version," Iizuka notes. The game also brings back Special Stage chases for Chaos Emeralds, based on the ones that appeared in *Sonic Heroes*.

» [3DS] The Big Arms battle is the main love for *Sonic 3* across both versions of *Generations*.

NGamer felt that the 3DS game was "good-looking and fan-pleasing, but a bit short" and awarded it 79%. *Official Nintendo Magazine* also noted the short length, but noted the "huge selection of missions" and gave it 85%. Less impressed, GamesRadar gave it 3.5/5, and said that "there is plenty to enjoy if you bother to look outside of the main story mode" but complained that "the new levels are just too unambitious and end up playing like Sonic's recent DS outings".

» [3DS] Modern Sonic's viewpoint sometimes slants, but full 3D gameplay isn't present.

» [3DS] Radical Highway is a stage Shadow originally played, but we'll let it slide.

BOSS RUSH

SIX FAMILIAR FOES AND ONE NEW NEMESIS STAND IN SONIC'S WAY

METAL SONIC

Calling back to Stardust Speedway in *Sonic CD*, this encounter pits Sonic against his automated antagonist in a running battle. Metal Sonic will try to charge at Classic Sonic from behind, blast him with electricity and crush him with scenery, and is vulnerable when visibly exhausted.

SILVER THE HEDGEHOG

This telekinetic terror races through Crisis City, flinging cars and other debris at Sonic. When he levitates multiple objects, they create a path that allows you to use the homing attack to strike him. For the final phase, lateral movement will evade his attack and create an opening.

SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

This is a reprise of the outer space race from *Sonic Adventure 2*. Stay ahead of Shadow to grab the glowing orbs that float around the stage, and once you've got two you'll be able to attack. Boost into the purple meteors to attack him, and you'll soon seal victory.

PERFECT CHAOS

Sonic Adventure's final antagonist is back, and the first part of the fight is rather familiar – boost through the flooded city and head straight for the moist menace. In the second phase, you'll need to navigate a treacherous path of fragmented platforms to deliver the final blow.

DEATH EGG ROBOT

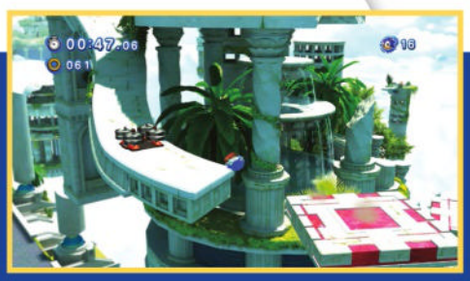
The final boss of *Sonic 2* returns, and thankfully isn't quite so resilient here. In the first phase, let it jump over you and then jump into its rear to knock it over. When the platforms appear, press a button to reveal a bomb, then lure Eggman into attacking it.

EGG DRAGOON

Returning from *Sonic Unleashed*, Eggman has given this plenty of attack patterns. It's easiest to hit when it stops and traps Sonic between two walls, allowing for wall jumps, but you'll be able to bop it in motion if you can avoid its fire and ice attacks and maintain top speed.

TIME EATER

The game's final foe is the traditional Super Sonic boss fight, and you can switch between Classic and Modern Sonic to shift the perspective of the stage. Launch your partner forward with the jump button, and don't forget to collect rings as they're constantly depleting.



» [PC] Even Classic Sonic's stages make use of the 3D visuals, twisting and turning even as Sonic's movement is fixed.

» [PC] Grab this helicopter at the beginning of Speed Highway and you'll uncover an alternate pathway.

» [PC] The GUN truck may not always chase Classic Sonic directly, but it's always a threat.

▶ came from a variety of musicians who had worked on the series throughout its history, including Tomoya Ohtani, Richard Jacques, Cash Cash and more.

Speaking to Sonic Retro in 2012, *Sonic Generations* sound director Jun Senoue explained that assembling the all-star team was a relatively straightforward process. "I heard about the levels we would have – Green Hill from the first one, Casino Night from the second – and then I heard about the different styles for Act 1 and Act 2. Then I just picked up the styles of music I wanted to get and I made a list of the musicians I wanted to team up with. I made some phone calls, dropped a line via email, and yeah, we had them," he said, though he did note that one desired collaborator proved elusive. "As for [Masato] Nakamura-san's music, I hoped I could team up with him to make an alternate version but he was not available," he lamented, referring to the composer for the original Mega Drive game.

For boss battles, Sonic Team chose a rival character of a similar stature to Sonic and a gigantic main boss for each era. Unlike the main stages, each boss was designated for either Classic or Modern Sonic, but the developers kept the core theme of the game in mind. "Act 1 stages were always nostalgic-themed, while Act 2 stages had more modern themes, so we kept the same concept for boss and rival battles. We created gameplay that was both nostalgic and new for them," Iizuka explains. "Specifically, we wanted the feeling of nostalgia to come through in the entrance scenes of the boss and rival characters, so we designed their entrance accordingly, then the gameplay would include new attacks and strategies to defeat the bosses and rivals to make for a fresh new gameplay experience."

As well as the main stages, players must complete a number of Challenge Acts to make progress. "Developing stages for all *Sonic* games – not just *Sonic Generations* – is a massive effort requiring a lot of time and energy. A stage that takes the development team half a year to create can be completed in no time because Sonic runs so fast. To get the most out of all the stage assets that took so long to create, we added Missions into the game," Iizuka remembers. The challenges included beating levels with a single ring, time attack goals and utilising particular power-ups to negotiate tricky areas. "For me, I really like the missions that involve co-operating with the other characters to complete because it reflects the 20th anniversary concept of the game," Iizuka says.

> "DEVELOPING STAGES FOR ALL SONIC GAMES IS A MASSIVE EFFORT REQUIRING A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY"
> **TAKASHI IIZUKA**

When it arrived in November 2011, *Sonic Generations* received positive reviews. Though *games™* felt that "we could do without the need to complete three challenge levels before being allowed to move on to the next series of proper stages" it still felt the game was "one of the best *Sonic* games in recent years", with "some genuinely imaginative and exciting level design", enough to earn it 7/10. *360 Magazine* said "it's great to see Sega really nail the 3D formula" and gave it 4/5. Other scores included 84% from *GamesMaster*, 8/10 from *Official PlayStation Magazine* and 70% from *Play*.

Sonic Generations wasn't just a critical turning point for the series. *Sonic Generations* managed to shift 1.85 million copies in its first six months and had a long tail, with the game still selected as a highlight in a 2021 financial statement from Sega. That success greatly influenced the future of the series. "Before *Sonic Generations*, we felt the Modern series moved the *Sonic* franchise forward from the Classic series, so the Classic series was regarded as Sonic's past. Our 20th anniversary title, *Sonic Generations*, was key in changing how we thought about things," Iizuka reflects. "Not only was it the first game to mix both the Classic and Modern series together, but it also made us think about preserving and growing both of those series as the *Sonic* brand continues, which ultimately led us to *Sonic Mania*."

After years of struggling to find a direction for Sonic, looking backward revealed the path forward. Examine the games that followed *Sonic Generations*, and you'll see a concerted effort to deliver on the heritage of the series. *Sonic Lost World* changed up the gameplay, but leans heavily on the highly stylised look of the early Mega Drive games, before *Sonic Forces* reprised the pairing of Classic and Modern Sonics and the gameplay associated with them. The aforementioned *Sonic Mania* took the opposite approach to *Sonic Generations* to critical acclaim, creating and remixing stages in a retro style, and *Sonic Superstars* has carried the Classic Sonic style forward.

If there's one thing Sonic fans love almost as much as the hedgehog himself, it's disagreeing with one another, and what's striking about *Sonic Generations* is its ability to unify such an argumentative bunch. Whether you wanted to blast through a 3D Green Hill Zone that would have been unimaginable in 1991 or desperately wanted to see Sonic and Shadow duel one more time, Sonic Team did as much as possible to fulfil those wishes, and the game is highly regarded as a result. So if you want to remember why you fell in love with Sonic all those years ago, or are simply curious as to what you've been missing out on, give *Sonic Generations* a play – you're bound to find something you'll love. ✱

» [PC] Seaside Hill is so striking in its updated incarnation, we're tempted to revisit *Sonic Heroes*.

» [PC] The thrilling final stretch of Crisis City Act 2 is a reminder that *Sonic 06* had some strong concepts.

A NEW GENERATIONS

IF ANYONE HAS A TORTURED PAST TO RESOLVE, IT'S SHADOW – AND HE'S ABOUT TO GET HIS CHANCE IN SONIC X SHADOW GENERATIONS

If you've ever wanted to try *Sonic Generations*, you're in luck – an expanded remaster titled *Sonic X Shadow Generations* is releasing imminently, and includes both the original game and an all-new *Shadow Generations* campaign. As Takashi Iizuka tells us, Sonic's silver-screen exploits were the impetus for the new release. "The second *Sonic The Hedgehog* movie was a success that teased Shadow The Hedgehog at the end, and almost immediately, we knew there was going to be a third movie with a focus on Shadow," he says. "The movies have done an amazing job of entertaining and introducing our characters to so many people who may have never played a *Sonic* game before, and probably haven't played the older games with Shadow."

Although Shadow was introduced in *Sonic Adventure 2* and had a solo adventure, Iizuka explains that *Sonic Generations* made the most sense as "The [original] concept was to create one game that combined all the great Sonic moments and introduce it to a younger audience while also being a fun celebration for fans that grew up playing the earlier games." As a result, Sonic Team felt that "this was the perfect game to bring back and add Shadow content to, because it would introduce our new movie audience to all the great moments from Sonic's and Shadow's histories".

While Shadow played a minor role in *Sonic Generations*, *Shadow Generations* is set during the same events. "Shadow was also affected by the chaos brought about by the Time Eater, so we wanted fans to see what happened to him in the White Space, while reintroducing some characters from the past," says Iizuka, detailing the story. "One of the characters we felt had to return was Black Doom. Even though Shadow had already defeated Black Doom in *Shadow The Hedgehog*, the destruction of time and space allowed this character, critical to Shadow's past, to come back and be a threat. There are also other critical characters from Shadow's past that return, and all play a part in explaining Shadow's dark origins and who he is as a character today."

With Black Doom returning, Shadow gains access to a whole selection of unlockable Doom Powers that set him apart from Sonic. "Different stages let Shadow show off his new abilities like surfing on water, gliding and completely transforming to move across different terrain," Iizuka tells us, before explaining their role in the game's new White Space hub world. "The White Space in *Sonic Generations* was a fun 2D platforming hub world, and we wanted to do even more for the *Shadow Generations* White Space, so we used elements from the *Sonic Frontiers*' Open-Zone design to create a 3D White Space. One of the reasons why we went in this 3D platforming direction was to enable Shadow to use all his Doom Powers in the White Space and really push players to run around and explore the hub world."

Of course, the bulk of the gameplay takes place in new *Generations*-style stages not previously seen in *Sonic Generations*. "We wanted to make sure the stages were pulled from the legacy titles that Shadow was involved in so new players could become familiar with his iconic levels and gameplay, and long-time fans could appreciate new ways to play through their favourite Shadow moments," Iizuka tells us. "It was also important to make sure a variety of past stages and visuals were reflected across an entire level, so players felt like they were speeding through various locations, not just one long stage. The team also had to consider the design of each stage and ensure they could create a *Generations*-style act with branching routes to get familiar with Shadow's Chaos Control and Doom Powers."

» [PlayStation 5] Shadow shows off his snazzy new wings. Who needs Knuckles for gliding, anyway?

» [PlayStation 5] With Doom's Eye in the distance, Shadow gives chase down the Radical Highway.

As for *Sonic Generations*, what can returning fans expect from the remaster? "Classic Sonic can now use the Drop Dash ability, which gives players new ways to traverse those levels, and we have also added new collectibles, additional bonus content and other surprises that we're looking forward to fans discovering," Iizuka teases. One new feature Iizuka mentions for *Sonic Generations* is Chao Rescue. "Chao have been hidden all over stages, and to find them all, players will need to explore paths they may have never run down before."

Sonic X Shadow Generations is scheduled to arrive on PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch and PC on 25 October – right around the time this magazine hits the shelves.

» [PlayStation 5] By using Chaos Control, Shadow can zip along these glowing pathways.

» [PlayStation 5] Don't forget that *Sonic Generations* is part of this remaster – it's still rather great.

» [PlayStation 5] Shadow's new Doom Powers are used for combat, navigation and more.

» [PlayStation 5] The Biolizard also served as a boss in the 3DS version of *Sonic Generations*.

» [PlayStation 5] We're curious to see how Metal Overlord factors in, as Sonic's crew defeated him in *Sonic Heroes*.

TIME TRIAL

OUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF SHADOW'S VOYAGE INTO HISTORY

While we weren't able to get a review into this issue we have had a chance to play a preview version of *Sonic X Shadow Generations* on PS5, so we thought we'd share some first impressions with you all. Playing through Green Hill and Chemical Plant in *Sonic Generations*, it feels like the remastered version will be a great way to play the game. Muscle memory meant that we didn't click with the revised controls, which are more like those of *Sonic Forces*, but it's possible to change them back. We did find some of the Chao, and they're a neat little addition.

As for *Shadow Generations*, we were able to play Space Colony Ark Act 1 and Kingdom Valley Act 1, and they lived up to the expectations we had based on the quality of *Sonic Generations*. Both captured the essence of what made those stages exciting in their original games, and we saw what Iizuka meant about representing a variety of past stages when the space colony gave way to Radical Highway. Shadow's Doom Powers ensure that he feels sufficiently different to Modern Sonic, while still offering similar high-speed thrills, and the new control scheme feels better here. Both stages took over five minutes to beat with the top S rank, so they feel nicely lengthy.

We also got to fight the Biolizard and Metal Overlord bosses. The former starts off similarly to *Sonic Adventure 2* but quickly reveals new and improved attack patterns, while Metal Overlord's battle was a little trickier, but once you're acquainted with Shadow's handling on water you should be good to go. Based on what we've played, we're looking forward to giving the final version a try in the very near future.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY
AND ENJOY **GREAT SAVINGS!**

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE NOW AT
www.magazinesdirect.com/RET/H24L
TELEPHONE **0330 333 1113** AND QUOTE **H24L**

TERMS & CONDITIONS Offer closes **16th January 2025**. Price is guaranteed for the first 6 months, please allow up to 6 weeks for the delivery of your first subscription issue (up to 8 weeks overseas) the subscription rate includes postage and packaging.*Savings are based on the cover price. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period. **Access to the digital library will end with your subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For UK enquiries please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle. For overseas enquiries please call: 1-844-779-2822. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-5pm EST.

Exclusive **Subscriber Cover** Every Issue!

Reasons to subscribe...

- **NEW!** Full digital access to 80+ back issues when you subscribe to print!**
- You'll never miss an issue!
- It's delivered direct to your door
- Brilliant value – save money on the cover price

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

PRINT + DIGITAL ACCESS

£21.06
EVERY 6 MONTHS
SAVE **40%!***

DIGITAL EDITION

£19.46
EVERY 6 MONTHS
SAVE **40%!***

To purchase single back issues (print format only) visit: **magazinesdirect.com** (click on 'Single issues' tab)
Or you can email: **help@magazinesdirect.com** For further help call: **+44(0)330 333 1113** Lines are open Mon-Fri 8.30am-7pm and Sat 10am-3pm UK time. Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited.
Full subscription prices: £70.20 for UK, €155 for Europe, $176 for US, £135 for Rest of World.

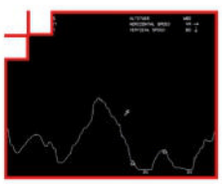
THE MAKING OF FIRE TRUCK

WHERE'S THE FIRE, BUDDY? PROGRAMMER WENDI ALLEN AND HARDWARE ENGINEER JOHN RAY TEAM UP TO TELL US ABOUT THE CREATION OF THE FIRST TRUE CO-OPERATIVE GAME IN ARCADE HISTORY

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- **DEVELOPER:** ATARI
- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **RELEASED:** 1978
- **GENRE:** OVERHEAD DRIVING



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUPER BUG
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1977

CANYON BOMBER
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1977

LUNAR LANDER (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1979

» The bezel around the screen depicts the towering inferno you are headed towards – though you never quite make it there…

Atari learned an important lesson early in its history – gamers loved taking on a human opponent. *Pong* had given Atari its first big hit at the start of the Seventies and *Tank* and *Gran Track 20*, both released into arcades in 1974, had similarly tapped into the appeal of challenging a frenemy for bragging rights. Yet by the end of the decade, Atari considered another possibility – wouldn't it be fun if players got to be on the same side? "I remember a discussion about whether a co-operative two-player driving game would be possible," recalls Wendi Allen, who had joined Atari in the summer of 1976, "and I vaguely remember someone, although I couldn't tell you who, saying that a fire truck requires two drivers…"

Thus, the first co-op coin-op was born. Yes, *Pong Doubles* (1973) had added another bat so a pair of paddle twisters could team up, but from its inception, *Fire Truck* was designed around the core concept of two players working together towards a common goal. The game tasked two brave firefighters with steering their articulated vehicle through the heart of the city, dodging parked cars, inconvenient oil spills and following on-road arrows at junctions directing them towards the blaze. The town planners of this particular metropolis seem to have revelled in sharp corners and unexpected chicanes, as well as building apartment blocks much too close to major highways, meaning jackknifing your vehicle into someone's front room is worryingly easy, especially when driving at speed. And speed you must – that faraway fire is raging.

Atari had introduced the multi-directional scrolling playfield with *Super Bug*, released the year before, and as Wendi had been the lead on that title, her debut for the company, it made sense that she would be the main programmer on this new project. "*Fire Truck* used the same technology as *Super Bug*, although it was necessary to enhance it in a couple of ways," she explains. "It needed a larger vehicle in the centre of the screen, so the ladder is actually a separate motion object from the front part of the truck, which was generated with the same circuitry as the car in *Super Bug*. We added a few more sounds, including a siren, and of course, we needed the ability to read a second steering wheel."

» [Arcade] Cornering is key – keeping the rear of your truck at least vaguely in line with the front will maintain your speed and avoid collisions.

Wendi Allen joined Atari in 1976, working on such seminal vector titles as *Lunar Lander* and *Asteroids*. She cofounded Videa in 1981, which would later become Bally Sente.

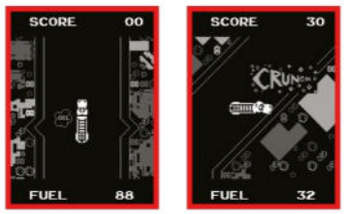
John Ray, pictured here in 1977, the year he joined Atari, stayed at the company until 2002, and was team leader for the *San Francisco Rush* series amongst many others.

Yes, *Fire Truck* did not only embrace the idea of co-op play on the screen, the game fully embodied it in the design of its imposing cabinet. The driver of the truck was seated at the front of the machine, while player two would stand behind them, using a second steering wheel to desperately try to keep the ladder section in line with the cab in front and avoid any nasty collisions. "The rear steering wheel would only affect the orientation of the back of the truck relative to the front, which is being dragged along for the ride, as in a real fire truck, so nothing clever was happening there," says Wendi, modestly. "What was a challenge was getting the self-driving to feel right. I had to make the game playable by a single person in either position, so I needed to implement computer driving for both the front and the back. When the computer was driving the front, I used the same technique as *Sprint II*. Although the road looks uniformly black to the player, there are actually eight different 'black' characters used to build the road, each containing an invisible arrow that can be 'read' by the software, telling the algorithm which way to steer. Then there was the challenge of getting the rear to behave reasonably when a single player was driving the front! I used a combination of the invisible arrows under the rear wheels, as well as the position of the front wheels, to determine how the rear of the truck should move."

For a black-and-white game released in the Seventies, there was a lot going on under the bonnet, including bespoke audio circuits to create your engine's wailing siren and horn. "That was all done with analogue circuitry, which was pretty tricky for me as my focus was primarily on digital electronics," notes John Ray, hardware engineer on the project. "*Fire Truck* was the first game I worked on and I learned a lot from Wendi. She was always very patient and helpful and gave me the perfect start to my Atari career. And I loved the idea that two people could play together co-operatively."

John was not the only one who loved the game. Wendi recalls being contacted by a firefighter in Northern California, who had bought a machine and installed it in the station house for the crew to enjoy, but now needed help to fix a fault. "We exchanged emails and I helped get the game working again," she smiles. "They were very grateful and I was very proud."

Given that the game pioneered the whole concept of co-op play, a legacy which can be traced from Atari's own *Space Duel* (1982) through to *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (2003) and beyond, is Wendi proud of what she began with *Fire Truck*? "Sure," she replies, "but I'm proud of most everything I did in those days!"



» [Arcade] The rear of your truck can easily swing out of control, causing many a nasty jackknifing incident.

» [Arcade] Playing with a co-driver is great, though it can induce road rage when they take a corner all kinds of wrong.

» [Arcade] Crashing into buildings and parked cars is accompanied by a sickening audio thud and comic book 'crunch' bubble.

"I REMEMBER A DISCUSSION ABOUT WHETHER A CO-OPERATIVE TWO PLAYER DRIVING GAME WOULD BE POSSIBLE AND SOMEONE SAID THAT A FIRE TRUCK REQUIRES TWO DRIVERS..."
WENDI ALLEN

HEY JOE!

THE STORY BEHIND THE SINGLE-PLAYER SEQUEL, SMOKEY JOE

Given Wendi had already spent considerable time creating a self-drive function in *Fire Truck*, meaning one player could steer either the front or the back of the vehicle with the computer taking on the role of co-driver, we wondered why Atari felt the need to release *Smokey Joe*, a dedicated single-player version of the game, later in the same year? "Ah, that was because operators complained that *Fire Truck* took up too much floor space for the amount of money that it was earning," explains Wendi, noting both games are identical in terms of gameplay. "Creating a single-player game in a standard-size cabinet seemed like a sensible way to generate more sales and amortise the development costs." The logic seems to have worked, as *RePlay* magazine listed *Smokey Joe* as the ninth highest-grossing game of 1978, with the original *Fire Truck* coming in at number 12 on the chart. And you can read all about the creation of the predecessor to both games, *Super Bug*, in **RG**138.

» The single player *Smokey Joe* looked very similar to its technological predecessor, *Super Bug*.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

RASTAN

WELCOME TO THE DANGEROUS REALM OF RASTAN, BRAVE WARRIOR, THIEF AND... MURDERER? IT'S AN UNCONVENTIONAL BEGINNING FOR THIS TALE OF EPIC BRAVERY AND SWORDSMANSHIP, AS THE MIGHTY BARBARIAN TAKES ON A HORDE OF CLASSIC MONSTERS, DRESSED IN JUST A FUR-LINED LOINCLOTH. TREASURE, GLORY - AND HOPEFULLY NOT TOO MUCH COLD WEATHER - AWAIT

WORDS BY GRAHAM MASON

» [Arcade] These bubbling acid pits are just another hazard for Rastan to leap over.

Thanks to Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Conan* films, barbarians were hot property in the mid-Eighties. By 1987, Tecmo had already released *Rygar*, and Palace Software was busy on its home-computer slash-'em-up, *Barbarian*. Clearly, loincloth-clad, hyper-muscular warriors were in fashion, and arcade fans soon had the ultimate slash-'em-up to sate their bloodlust.

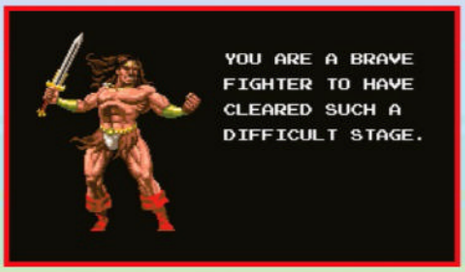
Taito's *Rastan* has two different plots depending on which version you play. In the Japanese game, having obtained the consent of the Princess Of Ceim, Rastan is on a mission to bring back the severed head of a dragon. Should he succeed, all the treasures of the empire will be his. The rest of the world got a somewhat more bizarre tale: having admitted to surviving his younger days by thieving and murdering – yes, murdering – Rastan is now king of his realm and looking back wistfully on his days of adventure. Sitting Conan-like on his throne, the king justifies his past endeavours as surviving in 'difficult times'. And now he wants to tell us all about it, inviting us to sit beside him as he divulges an adventure of danger and wonder. Don't fidget – remember his past.

Fed up of thieving and murdering [we get the point – Ed], Rastan decides to take out some of the real scum of his land. A legion of fantastical monsters lurks on the periphery of man's domain, each guarding the castle or caves that lead to their master. Should Rastan succeed in despatching the six bosses lurking in their lairs, fortune and – more importantly – fame will be his.

Rastan divides into six areas, each of which breaks down into three sub-stages. The first segment of each area is the hazardous open-air journey to the boss's dwelling, with enemies attacking the barbarian from every direction. The screen scrolls horizontally (with limited scope to backtrack) and later in every direction as Rastan explores caves beneath the surface. In the second segment, he enters the castle or caves just outside the boss's lair, which has more hazards, traps and enemies. Finally, the barbarian faces off against the round's chief antagonist. In the spirit of the rest of the game, this is usually a fantastical creature or warped humanoid [see the Boss Rush panel].

To help Rastan vanquish this immense army of monsters, he has a sword. A very big sword. Honestly, you probably couldn't even lift it. But Rastan can, and pressing the fire button

» [Arcade] An aged Rastan sits on his throne, ready to impart another tale of adventure.

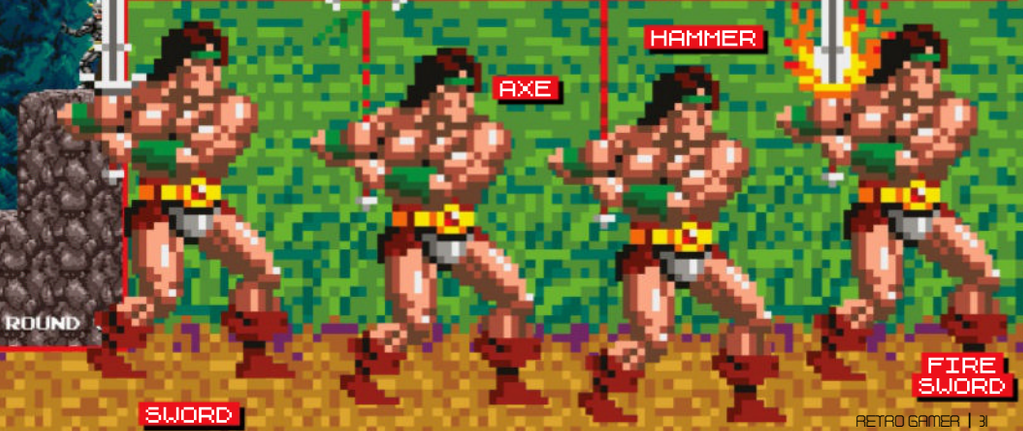


» [Arcade] Let us guess – does it mean playing the game again?

» [Arcade] *Rastan* contains many impressive backdrops.

"WE WANTED BIG SPRITES LIKE THE ARCADE, BUT THE AMSTRAD IS QUITE SLOW TO DRAW THEM"
BRIAN BEUKEN

» [Arcade] Confronting another demon in *Rastan*'s fifth stage.



1UP 00
HIGH SCORE 273100
2UP 00
AXE INCREASES YOUR OFFENSIVE POWER.
HAMMER EXTENDS YOUR OFFENSIVE RANGE.
FIRE SWORD INCREASES OFFENSIVE POWER BY SHOOTING FIRE BALL.
SHIELD REDUCES DAMAGE FROM ENEMY ATTACKS.

» [Arcade] The game helpfully lists all its power-ups.

» [Arcade] Flying enemies can be particularly troublesome.

▶ unleashes an almighty swipe, instantly turning most enemies into bloody viscera. For such a huge guy, he's also very agile, able to jump and leap (by pressing up and jump) and climb ropes while slashing at assailants. Some enemies, such as the half-lion half-goat Chimera, require a crouched attack; others, such as the winged Harpy, can only be destroyed by performing a flying swipe. Rastan also has two jump attacks in his locker: pressing fire while jumping up or down performs these; invaluable moves against those testy enemies that refuse to just stand there and let the barbarian slaughter them.

"THE MUSIC STILL HAUNTS ME" BRIAN BEUKEN

Other enemies include sword-fodder Lizard Men, spiky Centaurs, armoured Skeletons, knife-flinging Demons, giant snakes and heavily armoured humans. Each holds a different threat, and Rastan must deal with each accordingly. Our hero possesses an energy bar, sapped with each hit from an enemy or encounter with an environmental hazard. In a novel twist, this bar emanates from a pulsing heart; the closer Rastan is to death, the faster it beats, accompanied by a heartbeat sound effect.

While he may be fearless and powerful, Rastan needs help in this challenging quest. Littered through each area are magical items that will boost him in some way. The Shield, Mantle and Armature protect him from enemy attacks, while the Gold Sheep – presumably inspired by *Jason And The Argonauts*' Golden Fleece – increases the power of his attacks. Furthermore, picking up the Ring speeds up Rastan's attack, while the Rod has a mystery power. **Retro Gamer** has a feeling it lengthens Rastan's stride, but we could be wrong. In addition to these, bottles of Blue Potion boost Rastan's health, while the Red Potion reduces it. Finally, some enemies also drop Gems, which grant the barbarian a score bonus.

It doesn't end there, either. Rastan will have the opportunity to upgrade his sword at several points throughout each area. Usually perched high up are weapons; grab these, and he'll temporarily wield a powerful alternative. First up is the axe, located in a cavern inside round one, awarding Rastan extra power. The hammer (which looks more like a mace to us – but anyway) extends the range of his attacks, while the ultimate weapon, the Fire Sword, not ▶

» [Arcade] Each round contains a second segment set in a castle or cave.

BOSS RUSH

RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO RASTAN'S DEVILISH BOSSES AND HOW TO BEST THEM

ROUND ONE: KING GRATON

■ This skeletal creature wields a long halberd while occasionally raining daggers down on Rastan. Their kingly garb includes a crimson dress and golden cloak.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Their halberd has a long reach, but they rarely use it. Wait until they jump then leap in with a few swift swipes.

ROUND TWO: KING SLAY

■ Snakes spit blue fire at Rastan as King Slay athletically leaps around the screen. They also have a set of purple wings, which they use to escape danger.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Low blows are definitely the best here, avoiding King Slay's attacks and sapping their strength at the same time.

ROUND THREE: SYMPLEGADES

■ This deadly wizard is dressed in ornate clothes and casts blue fire at Rastan. Their teleportation spell makes them a tricky opponent.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

They are invincible when teleporting, which they do when Rastan approaches. Therefore, the jumping sword plunge from above is best used here.

ROUND FOUR: LAIOS, THE DRAGON KING

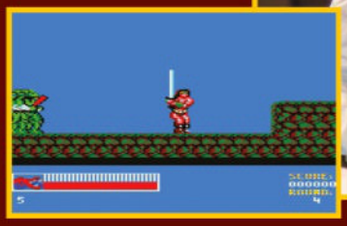
■ This well-armoured boss fires the same fireballs as Symplegades and possesses a powerful sword attack. They jump to avoid Rastan's sword.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Their jump is also their weakness – crouch beneath the leap and power several swipes with your sword when they land.

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER SPEAKS TO BRIAN BEUKEN ABOUT HIS AMSTRAD CPC PORT OF RASTAN



Were you familiar with *Rastan* the arcade game?
Not until the job landed on my desk! Ocean provided me with one of its briefcase board kits and we played it to death for a few weeks. The music still haunts me.

With whom did you work on *Rastan*?
I was working for Icon Design, a small work-for-hire code shop based in Prestwich, Manchester. The artist was Paul 'Prof' Windett, and there was a little help from another programmer in the building whom I can't recall. But he discovered the trick of resetting the blanks midway down the screen which allowed a fixed panel at the bottom.

The sprites are notably large in the arcade game. How much of an issue was that for you?
It was a massive issue. We wanted big sprites like the arcade, but the Amstrad is quite slow to draw them. I used the same compressed sprite routine that I had used on *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* – but even compressed, those sprites ate memory. Our initial enthusiasm for the game became strained when we needed to start saving bytes on every single thing, forcing us to drop the Mode 1 score panel and the flaming sword. Plus, we had to get imaginative with the sprites sharing legs across different monsters. If we had been allowed to make it 128K only, it would have looked amazing, but…

The bug that surfaced post-development must have been frustrating?
Rastan was tested thoroughly by Icon and Ocean and there were no obvious bugs – but the memory was absolutely, totally, completely full. The Speedlock system may have done something to use a bit of memory and caused some data to get mangled. We showed our masters at Ocean to prove it wasn't us, but we had no clue who was to blame or what was mangled.

Were you under a lot of pressure?
Oh yes, and Ocean was right to apply it – we overran quite badly due to the memory and speed issues. I was also working on other projects as the Amstrad 'specialist'.

How do you think you did in retrospect?
I did the best I could under the circumstances. It was far too big a project to fit into the standard Amstrad. With two screens used for smooth updates, you have about 26K of RAM to accommodate all those sprites, levels, characters, and fonts. It was challenging. We did ask for a 128K version, but the answer was no.

Our thanks to Brian for his time. To check out his latest work, Raspberry Pi space epic *Empires: Sins Of The Fathers*, head to patreon.com/BrianBeuken

ROUND FIVE: THE HYDRA

■ This five-headed creature spits fireballs at Rastan while advancing menacingly. Scaly but slow, it's nonetheless a formidable enemy.

HOW TO BEAT THEM
Keep your distance while slashing, and don't forget to duck when the fireballs appear. You'll need to remove all of its heads to win.

ROUND SIX: THE DRAGON

■ With its terrible roar and sweeping fire breath, this crimson dragon is Rastan's most formidable opponent. It is relatively agile for its size, too.

HOW TO BEAT THEM
Anticipating the fire breath is critical here as it severely saps Rastan's energy. Leap in once it's expended and hack away at its tail when it retreats.

CONVERSION CAPERS

AND LO, THE WARRIOR KING APPEARED IN OUR HOMES – HOW FARED HE?

AMSTRAD CPC

While graphically pleasing, some serious gameplay issues exist here as the Amstrad struggles to reproduce *Rastan*'s fast-paced action. Randomly spawning enemies don't help, and the jerky scrolling and general turgidness make it a chore to play. It's a shame the devs weren't permitted 128K of memory… or more time.

C64

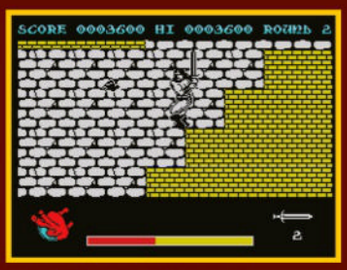
There's a kernel of a good game here, but it needed more playtesting. While getting poor Rastan to lock onto the many swinging ropes is the biggest issue and possibly bugged (especially in round four), a muddy display and other jumping issues add up to a frustrating game despite an epic Martin Galway tune.

GAME GEAR

This portable version goes by the name of *Rastan Saga*, understandable considering it was never officially released outside of Japan. It's a more-or-less direct port of the Master System game, with little consideration for the display change. Consequently, some of its graphics are flickery, but it's still a decent effort.

MASTER SYSTEM

Produced by Taito, this is a rather curious affair, spinning a fresh tale of destiny, cold steel and a kidnapped princess. This is a rather nice-looking game, although its sprites are quite small. The levels are abrupt, and while its star isn't quite as mobile as in the arcade game, and there's some slowdown, it's still one of the best home ports of *Rastan*.



ZX SPECTRUM

Ocean handed development duties for Imagine's Spectrum port to Icon Design, and it did an admirable job considering the restrictions. The game moves well, the sprites are sizeable and detailed, and Rastan is again a nimble fellow. However, as noted at the time, the multi-load sucked much fun out of the game, and a bug sometimes affected the levels loading.

PC

While admittedly released later than most other versions (1990), this DOS port of *Rastan* is surprisingly good. It appears that Rastan has been eschewing the weights for the treadmill, such is the speed at which he zips across each area. The hack-and-slash action is just as sweet, and it's evident much love was put into it by developer NovaLogic.

APPLE IIGS

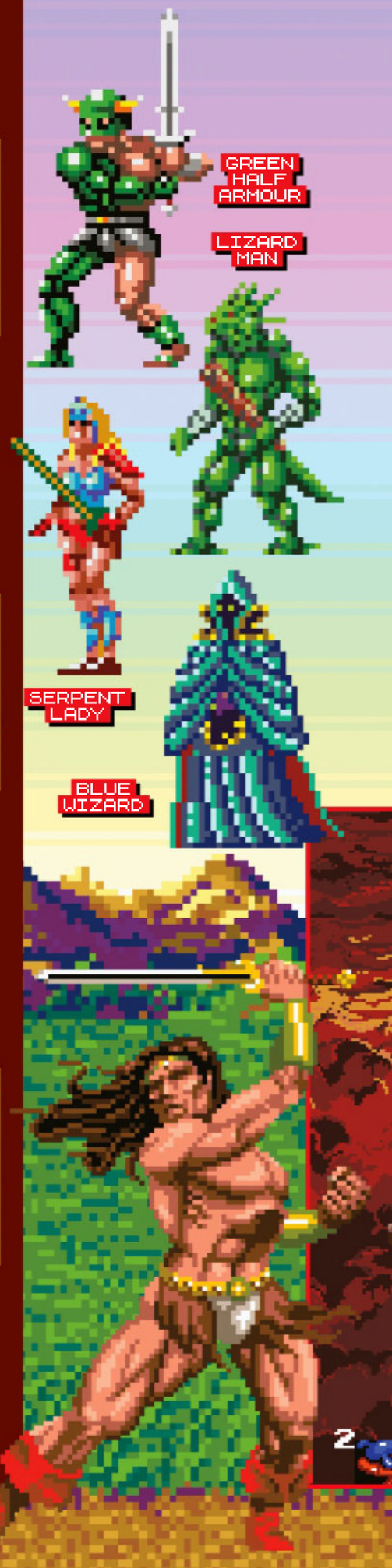
Another great-looking game on this 16-bit computer, and fast, albeit with some control issues. Ported by NovaLogic, this, alongside the PC game, has yet *another* plot – it takes place in the ancient land of Lograth, and the king is now evil and must be defeated. We give up.

MSX

Another Taito port, and like the Game Gear game this was Japan only, thus reverting to the *Rastan Saga* moniker. Graphically, Rastan himself looks superb, although the colour-bland enemies are a disappointment. The main gameplay difference is that it's flick screen, but that doesn't harm the hacking fun.

ATARI ST

Until a few years ago, when erstwhile Ocean artist Mark Jones recovered a demo disk, this 16-bit attempt at *Rastan* was unheard of. Why Ocean abandoned it remains a mystery, although technical issues and time constraints – the bane of the published 8-bit versions – are most likely.



only increases Rastan's power but also shoots fireballs, useful for taking out enemies from a safe distance. Sadly, all these enhancements only last a short time (except for the Ring) and instantly vanish should Rastan lose a life.

> "WE DID ASK FOR A 128K VERSION, BUT THE ANSWER WAS NO"
> BRIAN BEUKEN

Released in the spring of 1987, *Rastan* became a big hit in the summer of that year as fans flocked to its brutal, primal gameplay. It helped that the game looked fantastic: hefty, impressive sprites backed up with some incredible backdrops and environmental effects. Anyone skilled enough to make it to round six is in for a treat with its blood-red skies and a violent thunderstorm framing the foreground mayhem. The sound is excellent, too, its three rumbling tunes complementing the action perfectly, especially the stentorian thunder of the boss fights.

Named *Rastan Saga* in Japan, the game was initially released under the same name in Europe, causing confusion when it eventually became abbreviated to just *Rastan*. By the time Ocean Software, under its Imagine imprint, released multiple home ports a year later, *Rastan* was still occasionally promoted under its original name. A new plot surfaced for these versions, too: now, an evil wizard named Karg has opened up a portal, unleashing thousands of monsters upon the world of Maranna. Maranna's king, Rastan, takes it upon himself to rid his realm of these monsters before facing off against Karg, in his deadliest guise, a soul-sucking dragon. Bizarrely, the Sega Master System game revealed yet another plot, this time involving six devious lords and a kidnapped princess, with Rastan, a mere blade-for-hire, summoned by the king to rescue his daughter.

Rastan's success engendered arcade sequels, which failed to bypass the naming confusion. In Japan, *Rastan Saga II* was simple enough; however, rather than renaming it as *Rastan II* in Europe and the US, it was released as *Nastar* and *Nastar Warrior*, respectively. A second sequel, *Warrior Blade: Rastan Saga Episode III*, added more words and further bewilderment.

Inconsistent naming aside, the original *Rastan* remains a technical marvel of a second golden age of arcade gaming. There can surely be no finer adventure for fans of Robert E Howard's famous character, even if Rastan actually bears more similarities to another of the writer's creations: Kull The Conqueror – depending on which plot you follow… ✱

[Arcade] Dramatic skies for the final round.

THE SAGA CONTINUES

THE ONGOING ADVENTURES OF THE ARCADE'S FINEST WARRIOR KING

RASTAN SAGA II

Taito quickly turned around this sequel to capitalise on the series' popularity. The sprites are even larger (!), and there's another vast range of striking enemies. Unfortunately, while it has some fresh gameplay elements such as destroyable blocks, co-op play, new power-ups and a bouncy soundtrack, the game feels rushed, especially with its laughably difficult – and unimaginative – boss fights. *Rastan Saga II* was ported to just the Sega Genesis outside of Japan but under its original title rather than *Nastar*.

WARRIOR BLADE: RASTAN SAGA EPISODE III

Unbelievably, Rastan and his enemies got even bigger for this third arcade game, now featuring a second monitor and moulded into a *Golden Axe* template. Two further playable characters join our familiar friend, a female warrior named Sofia and a ninja-esque chap called Dewey. Released in 1991, it's a fine game graphically and plays as swiftly as the original. Alongside the co-op play are smashable containers, magical powers, horse-riding segments and some appropriately gruesome bosses.

BARBARIAN

With its European publisher, Titus, on its last legs, Taito acquired the distribution rights for Saffire's 3D beat-'em-up, *Barbarian*, in its local market, renaming one of its characters to Rastan and adding the name to the title for its Japanese release. Cosmetic changes aside, it's a generic beat-'em-up with little to redeem it and virtually no connection to the original series beyond its name and the Conan-styled fighter. It represents a sad end to the series… for now.

THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO

AMSTRAD CPC 464

LORD SUGAR'S BUDGET COMPUTER MIGHT HAVE TRAILED BEHIND ITS PEERS, BUT IT STILL HAD PLENTY OF GREAT GAMES TO DISCOVER

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

The success of the Commodore 64 and Spectrum saw other companies take note and it wasn't long before Amstrad entered the market with its own range of computers. Unlike their competitors, they typically launched with green or coloured monitors and built-in cassette decks, giving them quite an advantage due to many people only having a single television in the household.

Although it had a massive following in France, and the UK, lazy Spectrum ports and a lack of killer exclusives meant that Amstrad's machine trailed behind its competitors and it went on to sell just over three million units across its entire range. We're focussing on the original tape-based CPC 464 here and covering the titles that really made the machine sing. How many of the following classics did you get to experience? ✱

SORCERY 1985

THE GANG OF FIVE

■ It was hard going for Amstrad in the early days, with many gamers content with their Spectrums and C64s. *Sorcery* was one of the first exclusives that proved the Amstrad was more than capable of delivering in the software stakes, and even today, it looks absolutely phenomenal thanks to its beautiful chunky visuals and slick scrolling (for an Amstrad game at least). The actual gameplay is rather simplistic, requiring you to have the relevant item to unlock the captured wizards, but it plays exceptionally well and has a tough, but fair difficulty level. An update, *Sorcery+*, was later released for the CPC 6128.

DONKEY KONG 1986

ARCANA SOFTWARE DESIGN

■ There are far too many great Amstrad arcade conversions to feature here, so we're going to concentrate on only covering the cream of the crop. *Donkey Kong* is the cherry proudly perched atop all the delicious cream, and it remains perhaps the best conversion of the game from its time period.

Ocean's port is staggeringly good. It retains the original ratio of the arcade coin-op, has extremely similar aesthetics and even manages decent sound effects. The collision detection feels spot on, but more importantly, it features every single level of the arcade game, a feat even Nintendo's own 8-bit console couldn't manage. It is a truly outstanding arcade port that still manages to impress today.

A BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH JIM BAGLEY

THE VETERAN DEVELOPER TALKS AMSTRAD GAMING

What benefits did the Amstrad offer over its peers?

The Amstrad had the ability to put any of the 16 colours from a palette of 27 in any pixel on the screen. There were also no attributes like on the Commodore 64 and Spectrum.

Why were so many Amstrad ports of the time similar to their Spectrum counterparts?

I guess the majority of Amstrad ports were similar to their Spectrum counterparts probably because they were written by the same person who did the Spectrum version. Also the sprite sizes and coding would be the same on the Spectrum, compared to taking the C64 art, so unfortunately for Amstrad users it makes for a faster port. For the likes of the games I had to port to Amstrad, the artist did a mega quick conversion to four colours so they could get onto starting the next Spectrum game.

What's the best Amstrad game you've played and why?

That's a tough one to answer. I have three favourite Amstrad games (well according to me anyway) *Ikari Warriors*, *Bomb Jack*, and *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. It's mainly because they were written for the Amstrad, rather than ported from the Spectrum version to the Amstrad.

Why do you think the Amstrad CPC 464 was less popular than systems like the C64 and the ZX Spectrum?

I'd say because it was expensive because it also came with a monitor unlike the Spectrum and C64, which you could use with your existing TV.

BACTRON 1986

VINCENT BAILLET

■ The Amstrad is a haven for isometric games and this one is a doozy. Taking place in a human body, you must navigate the poorly human, whilst looking for yellow enzymes to activate and avoid the viruses that are trying to stop you. It's all finished off with great music and gorgeous animation. ▶

THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD 1986

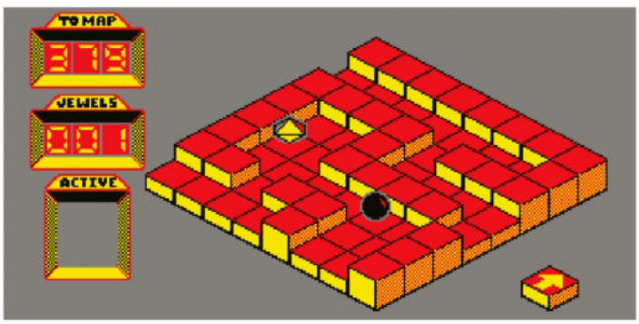
PALACE SOFTWARE

■ This remarkable effort from Palace Software came out the same year as Nintendo's *Metroid* and is a very similar game (although it was created with no knowledge of the classic Nintendo title). Playing as a warrior named Tal, you initially only have access to throwing rocks, but as you unlock parts of the titular armour, the game world slowly opens up. The original release came with an impressive 16-page comic by graphic artist, Daniel Malone, while its name was changed to the rather naff-sounding *Rad Warrior* for its US debut.

STARGLIDER 1986

ARGONAUT SOFTWARE

■ Jez San loved playing the arcade version of *Star Wars* so much he created his own unofficial version. Although originally created for 16-bit home computers, *Starglider* is no slouch on the CPC, either, and it runs at a very impressive pace. It's a simple shoot-'em-up at heart, just like the game it's based on in fact, but that doesn't take anything away from its hectic and exhilerating gameplay.



SPINDIZZY 1986

PAUL SHIRLEY

■ This isometric gem by Paul Shirley is a harmonious merging of action and puzzle gameplay and sees you controlling a unique device that can transform between three distinctive forms. You have to navigate the sprawling game world against a tight time limit, which can be extended by collecting gems. *Spindizzy* uses basic physics to help enhance its puzzles, but also utilises ramps, jumps and other obstacles to ensure its gameplay always feels fresh with each new play through. Hugely popular on release, *Spindizzy*'s success resulted in a sequel, *Spindizzy Worlds*, in 1990. Sadly, it never materialised on the Amstrad.

GET DEXTER 1986

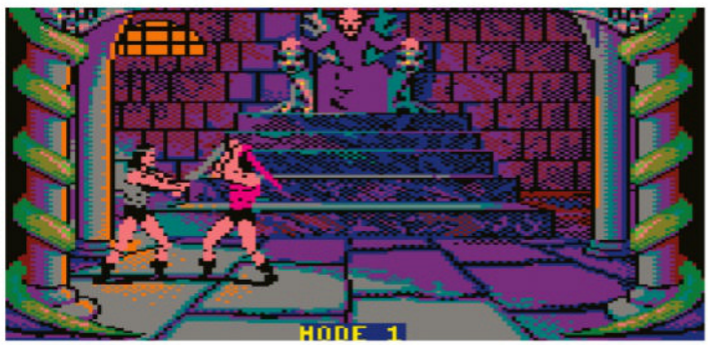
REMI HERBULOT

■ This French classic started off life as an Amstrad exclusive, before eventually getting ported to the Atari ST in 1987. Created by Remi Herbulot when he was still a teenager *Get Dexter* is a fun isometric adventure with a heavy emphasis on puzzle solving that still holds up well today. Unlike many isometric Amstrad games, which look like slightly enhanced Spectrum ports, *Get Dexter* offeres sensational visuals that are bright and chunky and exceptionally animated. It is no slouch in the puzzle department either, with plenty of clever head-scratchers that never outstay their welcome. Known in France as *Crafton & Xunk*, it's a wonderfully surreal little game that was succeeded by a less impressive sequel in 1988.

EXOLON 1987

RAFFAELE CECCO

■ The talented Raffaele Cecco did some amazing work on the Amstrad, and *Exolon* is one of his best efforts. It's an incredibly vibrant run-and-gun that sees your lone fighter trying to navigate 25 screens of absolute carnage with just his wits, lasers and missiles to rely on.



BARBARIAN 1987

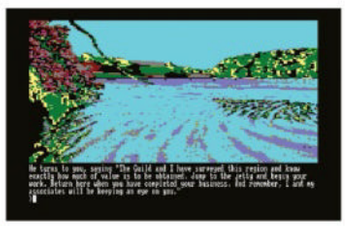
PALACE SOFTWARE

■ We were all set to include *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* here, until we remembered that *Barbarian* allows you to chop people's heads off! While *Barbarian* is extremely gruesome and clearly inspired by the *Conan* movies, it's a great fighter on its own merits, with a solid range of special moves and exceptional animation. Page 3's Maria Whittaker and that bloke who played Wolf in *Gladiators* starred on its controversial cover.

AUF WIEDERSEHEN MONTY 1987

GREMLIN GRAPHICS

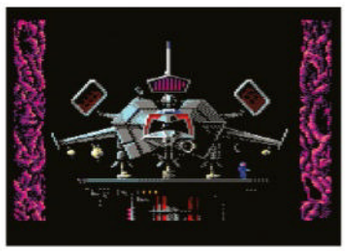
■ Several *Monty* games appeared on the CPC, but this remains our favourite. It's a classic platformer where Monty must travel around Europe collecting enough money so that he can retire on the island of Montos. Some of the European caricatures feel a little suspect in today's climate, but there's nothing wrong with its tight responsive gameplay and clever level design.



GUILD OF THIEVES 1987

MAGNETIC SCROLLS

■ This is quite simply the best graphic adventure that you can play on the CPC 464 thanks to its expansive parser, humorous dialogue and genuinely challenging puzzles. Set in the same enchanting world as its predecessor, *The Pawn*, *Guild Of Thieves* sees you trying to get into the titular guild by amassing as much loot as possible, as well as interacting with some extremely memorable characters.



TRANTOR: THE LAST STORMTROOPER 1987

PROBE SOFTWARE

■ Prior to making a fortune selling *Gaikai*, David Perry was a superb 8-bit coder who dabbled in various systems before founding Shiny Entertainment. This rather swish effort was turned around in a manner of months, and is an excellent port of Nick Bruty's original Spectrum game. It's a classic run-and-gun with sensational-looking visuals, great weapons and lots of scary monsters to battle. It's admittedly rather light on content, but remains a ridiculous amount of fun all the same.

A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH MIKE LAMB

THE FORMER OCEAN SOFTWARE PROGRAMMER DISCUSSES THE 464

What were the Amstrad's strengths compared to its 8-bit peers?

First, individual pixel colour addressing. Second, more memory, though to be honest you really needed it because the graphics took far more space than other systems. Third, [it had] a monitor, keyboard and floppy disk built-in. In theory these shouldn't really matter for games but it made developing for it a whole lot nicer.

Why were there so many inferior Amstrad ports of Spectrum games created for the system?

Simple: time and money.

Why do you think the games of Ocean Software were so popular with Amstrad owners at the time?

They could expect decent sales on most of their big licensed titles so it made a lot more sense to spend [more time on Amstrad] development. John Brandwood (also known as Johnny Amstrad) set the standard at Ocean Software for CPC work. He also developed graphics and compression tools that the rest of us used.

What do you consider your very best Amstrad game and why?

I would pick my *Arkanoid* conversion because the game didn't need scrolling and the graphics made it much better looking than the other available versions.

Are there any Amstrad games you wished you'd worked on?

Easily, *Renegade*. John Brandwood and Mark Jones did a great job with it.

HEAD OVER HEELS 1987

JON RITMAN

■ Jon Ritman's follow-up to isometric adventure *Batman* remains one of his best loved games. Unlike many games of the time, play is split between two distinct characters, Head and Heels, who each have unique abilities. It's a great concept, helped further by a huge sprawling game world and some truly deviously designed stages that require a fair amount of head-scratching to solve. It's full of great humour, too, thanks to excellent sprite work by the late Bernie Drummond.

RENEGADE 1987

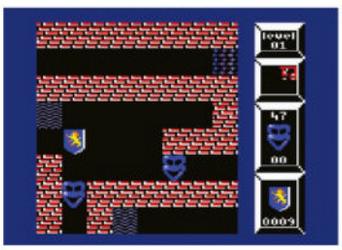
IMAGINE SOFTWARE

■ This remains one of the greatest beat-em-ups on Amstrad's console. It's a cracking port of the original Technos coin-op and another excellent piece of coding from Mike Lamb, who also worked on the exceptional *RoboCop*. Spread across several levels, *Renegade* features the same three-way button configuration of the coin-op, which not everyone could get to grips with. Master it, though, and you'll find yourself able to pull off all sorts of brutal moves, including a deadly knee to your opponent's groin. It was followed up by an equally solid sequel called *Target: Renegade*, although the less said about *Renegade III: The Final Chapter*, the better.

XOR 1987

ASTRAL SOFTWARE

■ This intriguing maze game was released on a number of systems, but the Amstrad version is easily our favourite. The aim of the game is relatively simple: traverse a maze and capture all the masks found there with your two shields, Magus and Questor. Initially, you simply have to deal with force fields, which can only be entered by a certain direction. However as the game progresses, chickens, fish and other dangerous hazards come into play. It's tricky but oh so satisfying when you finally figure a tricky solution out.

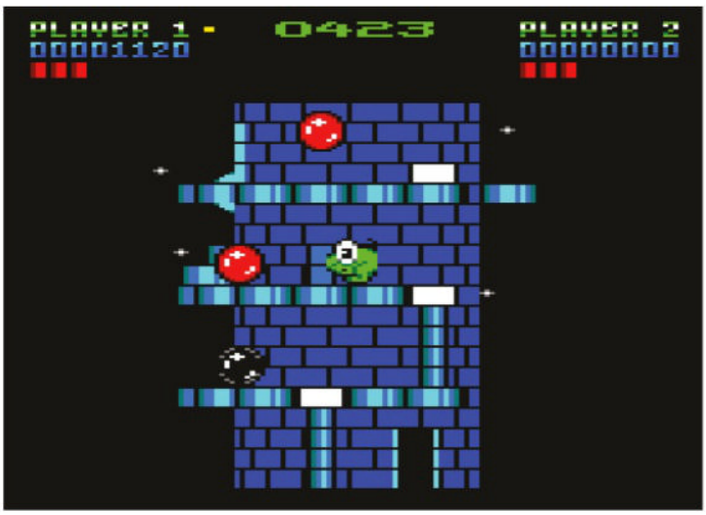


ROBOCOP 1988

OCEAN SOFTWARE

■ Ocean was no stranger to film and TV licences, but many of its earlier efforts were abysmal. *RoboCop* was not only one of its most successful licences ever, but also helped set the template for what would follow, with levels based around key sequences from the film.

Coded by Mike Lamb, *RoboCop* is first and foremost a run-and-gun, with the vast majority of its levels featuring numerous bad guys for RoboCop to gun down. Every now and then, however, the stages are punctuated by smaller interludes that range from saving a woman captured at knife point, to putting together an identikit of a bad guy. It works brilliantly, so well in fact that Ocean's game stayed at the top of the charts for months. Ocean would take several more stabs at the franchise in the intervening years, but its original effort remains the best.



NEBULUS 1988

CHRIS WOOD

■ Clever programming made the towers in *Nebulus* continually rotate as main character Pogo climbed up them. *Nebulus* is far more than a snazzy tech demo however, and the clever design of the towers soon proved that original creator John M Phillips had put a lot of thought into their actual construction. An obscure sequel was released solely for the Amiga in 1991.

OPERATION WOLF 1988

OCEAN SOFTWARE

■ We came close to including *Chase HQ*, but this ultimately won out. It's a highly polished version of the Taito coin-op, which features huge sprites, decent scrolling and plenty of fast-paced action. Like its arcade parent, this Amstrad port isn't the most complex of games and it's crying out for some two-player action, but the gunplay never lets up for a second, ensuring every game is fast and exciting.

TOTAL ECLIPSE 1988

INCENTIVE SOFTWARE

This ridiculously ambitious effort was the third game to utilise the 3D engine Freescape and was set in Egypt in the Thirties. It's a very clever adventure game that utilises mechanics such as dehydration and a heart monitor to ensure you're fit enough to navigate the many traps found in the massive pyramid you're exploring. It runs at a painfully slow rate, but the smartly designed puzzles and the clever ideas (a flashlight lets you explore darker regions of the pyramid) ensure you keep playing.

DALEY THOMPSON'S OLYMPIC CHALLENGE 1988

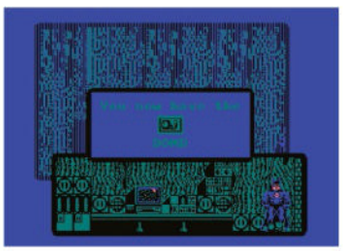
OCEAN SOFTWARE

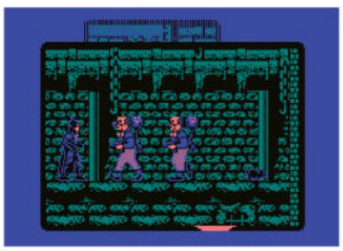
The final *Daley Thompson* game remains our favourite. The graphics are superb, with lovely animation and large, vibrant sprites, while the events themselves are nice and varied – ranging from the Discus and Pole Vault to the 100-Metre Hurdles. Special mention goes to the series of training events that determined your overall fitness level for each new day and the ability to choose different trainers to wear in the field.

SAVAGE 1988

PROBE SOFTWARE

Coded by David Perry, *Savage* is essentially three games in one, each of which pushes the CPC to its absolute limits. Section one is a run-and-gun featuring a gigantic main sprite and lots of crazy particle explosions. The second level switches pace and perspective, turning into a *Space Harrier*-styled shooter, while the last is an exploration-based shooter where you fly an eagle around a huge labyrinth in search of escape. It's certainly hard, but it plays well and still looks brilliant today.

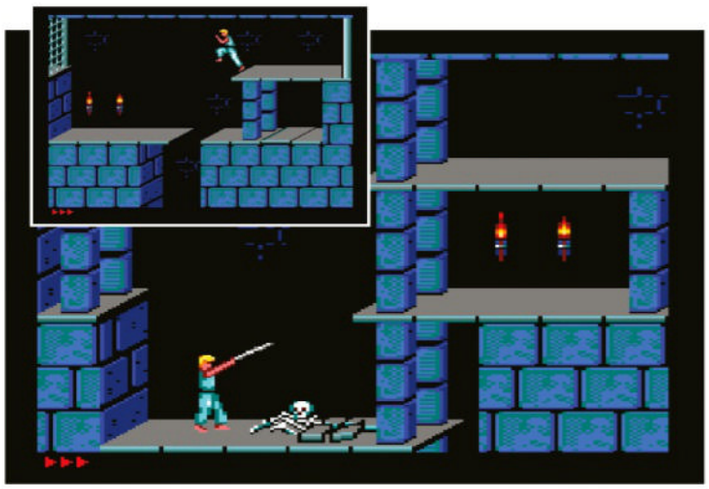




BATMAN: THE CAPED CRUSADER 1988

SPECIAL FX SOFTWARE

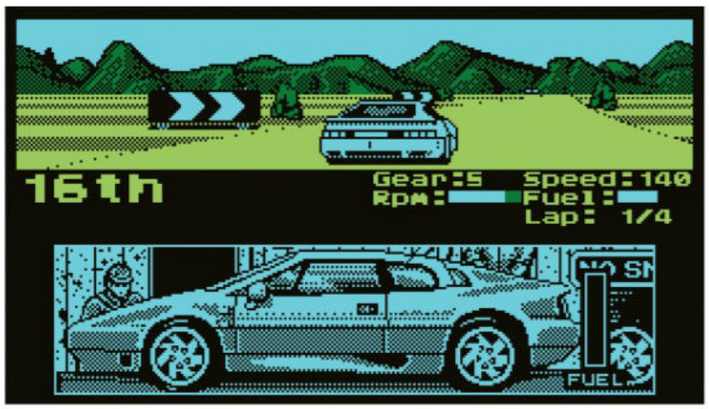
Coded by Jim Bagley, *The Caped Crusader* is great value for money as Batman has two distinct cases to solve. Not only do the graphics look nice and cartoon-like, even the screens ape the comics, with each area opening up in a separate comic panel. Fuelled by an excellent and very comprehensive icon system, *Batman: The Caped Crusader* is a thoroughly gripping adventure that needs to be experienced.



PRINCE OF PERSIA 1990

MICROIDS

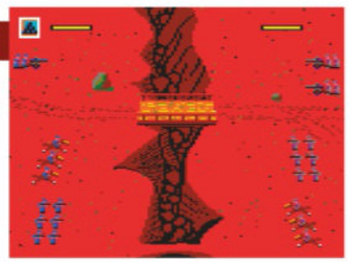
The incredible success of Jordan Mechner's Apple II game meant it was ported to a huge number of systems. The Amstrad was no exception, and we're delighted to say that it received a truly stunning port ny Microids that no doubt had Spectrum and C64 owners incredibly jealous. It's essentially exactly the same game as the Apple II original, meaning the Prince has just 60 minutes to navigate a huge dungeon and rescue his beloved Princess. It's massively improved over Mechner's original, though, thanks to some beautifully detailed sprites, tight controls and great use of colour throughout.



LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE 1990

ALI DAVIDSON

The CPC didn't have many good original racing games, but it did have this fine port of the hit Amiga game. Once you get past the weak visuals, you'll discover that *Lotus Esprit* is an excellent racer with a large number of different courses, lots of individual settings to tweak and an excellent two-player mode. Sadly, the CPC didn't receive either of the two sequels.



NORTH & SOUTH 1991

NEW FRONTIER

Based on the popular Belgian comic *Les Tuniques Bleues*, *North & South* is a wonderful strategy game where you try to capture as much enemy territory as possible. There are a large number of different battalions to master, from cannons to horsemen while the graphics are exceptional, easy matching the impressive 16-bit ports.

This feature first appeared in issue 181 of games™.

Alien Syndrome

PUTTING THE RUN IN RUN-AND-GUN

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1987 » SANRITSU

It's no secret that videogames generally used to be a lot more difficult than they are today, so it's not uncommon for me to revisit an old favourite, only to receive the kind of vicious thrashing that makes me worry that I'm past the peak of my gaming powers. Fortunately, games like *Alien Syndrome* exist to convince me otherwise. I first encountered the Master System conversion of Sega's run-and-gun as a young child – young enough that I had no awareness of the *Alien* film series that so clearly influenced it – and I found the game too difficult to be much fun, rarely even reaching the first boss.

Well, the kid I was may have had the advantages of more free time and fewer responsibilities, but that's no match for the gaming experience and superior tactical thinking I possess as an adult. Never mind the fact that I have a greater ability to mentally map the levels as I go along, the important thing is that I know *how* to engage with the enemy. Even as a child, I could tell that the enemies would spawn infinitely, but back then I wanted the screen as clear as possible before I tried to move on. These days I understand that unnecessary fighting is a fool's errand, and that simply running past slower enemies saves time – and it's always best to be constantly on the move anyway, since aliens can appear directly on top of you if you stand around.

When I see the weird blobby first boss now, a foe that seemed insurmountable in my childhood, it's a mere stepping stone to be overcome with my flamethrower as I seek a greater challenge. Thinking back, most of my old favourites seem harder today because I'm not abusing a cheat cartridge these days, but all the same I'm reassured that I'm still capable of getting good – and thanks to that, *Alien Syndrome* has finally won me over.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

X-OUT

IF THERE WAS ONE THING THE AMIGA COULDN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT, IT WAS A LACK OF HIGH-QUALITY HORIZONTAL SHOOT-'EM-UPS: APIDYA, AGONY, PROJECT-X AND URIDIUM 2 ARE JUST SOME OF THE BEST KNOWN NAMES. WAS THERE ROOM FOR MORE SHOOTER ACTION? HELL, YEAH!

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

» [Amiga] Unlike most of its shooter counterparts, *X-Out* is not set in outer space, but underwater.

» [Amiga] *X-Out* is not only characterised by a large number of simultaneously attacking enemies, but also by its challenging level design.

» [C64] No classic shoot-'em-up is complete without oversized boss monsters and *X-Out* is no exception.

If you're going to go all out, you might as well do it right. So it was only logical that Rainbow Arts should advertise its *X-Out* as "the ultimate shoot-'em-up". In retrospect, this may have been a bit of an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that the game, which was essentially developed by just five people, got a lot of things right: smooth left-to-right horizontal scrolling, a multitude of powerful weapons, a rechargeable super shot, plenty of enemies and impressive boss battles. The game also surprised with a very unusual scenario – for a change, the invading aliens were fought not in space, but underwater.

According to the game's manual, this invasion took place in 2019, which was a long way off in 1990, the year the game was released. Many internet sources claim that at least the C64 version, which was assumed to have been developed first, was released in 1989 – but none of this statement is actually true, as game director Teut Weidemann confirmed to us. The Amiga and Atari ST versions were developed first, simultaneously even, thanks to an advanced cross-compiler by programmer Heiko Schroeder, and released in January 1990. The C64 version was a conversion developed in-house by Rainbow Arts and released a few months after the 16-bit originals. All versions were originally supposed to be released at the end of 1989, but this date could not be kept – according to Teut, the developer of the C64 version simply forgot to correct the year in its title screen.

"MANY INTERNET SOURCES CLAIM THAT THE C64 VERSION, WAS RELEASED IN 1989 – BUT NONE OF THAT STATEMENT IS ACTUALLY TRUE "

Unlike most of its horizontally scrolling contemporaries, *X-Out*, which was originally going to be called *Medusa*, was not based on an arcade game like *R-Type*, *Darius* or *Gradius*, but was a native development for the home computers of the time. Of course, this doesn't change the fact that it plays like its obvious brethren, but underneath the laser-heavy surface there are a couple of surprising features. The most important of these is the shop, which you automatically visit before each new level. Here you can buy new ships and equip them with laser cannons, missiles, lightning guns and defence satellites. This may seem like a neat gimmick at first, but you soon realise that there is no typical life system in *X-Out*: when the yellow energy bar runs out, which will

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH HOME-COMPUTER VERSION NEEDS TO BE CROSSED OUT?

AMIGA

■ The Amiga was the main platform for *X-Out*, and its development focussed primarily on this version. As a result it is the most polished iteration with excellent graphics, superb sound and gripping playability. If you have to choose one version, it should be this one.

ATARI ST

■ The Atari ST version was created at the same time as the Amiga version thanks to Heiko Schroeder's cross-compiler, but differs significantly from it – the playfield is much smaller, the scrolling is a bit jerky and the music by Juergen Piscol sounds clearly inferior to the original. That certainly doesn't make it a bad game, but it's also nowhere near as good as its 16-bit brother.

C64

■ The C64 version released in April 1990 was the first 8-bit version of *X-Out*, and it is by far the best. Developed by Joerg Prenzing (a programmer at Golden Goblins), the C64 version is technically very similar to 1988's *Katakis*, and shares its graphics artist Andreas Escher. An excellent conversion, with a great soundtrack by Michael Hendricks and Adam Bulka (aka FAME).

ZX SPECTRUM

■ The Speccy version is the first one not developed by Rainbow Arts directly, but by Arc Developments. It is the second game from that British company after the Spectrum version of Capcom's *Forgotten Worlds*. With the exception of the intro and outro images, this version is monochrome, but runs impressively smoothly and at lightning speed. Also, the reward at the end of each level is 4,000 credits instead of 3,000.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ This version also comes from Arc Developments, and is much more colourful than its 8-bit brother. However, it runs a lot slower and is more jerky, which unfortunately makes it a lot less fun to play. But again, there is an increased credit bonus at the end of each level.

» [Amiga] After a tough final battle, you are rewarded with a beautiful outro graphic and a slightly bizarre text message.

» [Amiga] You can buy new ships and weapons in the shop, with money that you get by shooting down enemies.

happen rather quickly if you're not careful, the game is over immediately – by default you only have one life, which means one ship. This is where the shop comes in. You start the game with a paltry 12,000 credits, which is just enough for the most basic ship, a laser that fires in three directions, a homing missile and a wide-ranging secondary shot.

Here's the twist, though. For every enemy you shoot down, you earn points. These points not only add to your high score but also act as currency. In other words, the more enemies you kill, the more you can spend in the shop. This means not only more and better weapons, but also more and better ships. You can build a fleet of up to nine ships, all of which are individually armed. This means a maximum of nine lives, because if you lose a ship in the game, the next one in your fleet will be brought in immediately in its stead. However, you must be able to afford this luxury, as better weapons obviously cost more credits – as do better ships, which allow more cannons, which cost more money, etc.

BOSS RUSH

HOW TO CROSS OUT EVERY BOSS

BOSS 01

DESCRIPTION:

This rather disgusting-looking foe seems to have a brain where its body should be. It gives us endless nightmares just looking at it.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

The first thing to do is to take out the two orange tubes. Once that has been achieved, the head of the beast will detach and fly around. At the top left, just below the ceiling, you cannot be hit by it, so position yourself there.

BOSS 02

DESCRIPTION:

You'd hope a life underwater would mean this metallic monstrosity would have rusted up – no such luck. This is going to be a tough fight.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

First destroy the grapple arm in the middle. Then turn to the two lower ones, whose colour coding ensures that no more enemies will appear from the upper doors once they've been destroyed.

BOSS 03

DESCRIPTION:

This oval construction doesn't fire directly at the player; instead, it hurls glowing mines that explode if they aren't shot in quick time.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

The emplacement has two stages, but the first can be destroyed almost instantly if you use some of your high-powered weapons. Try to eliminate one or two mines before concentrating fire on it.

BOSS 04

DESCRIPTION

Looking a little like the forgotten love child of ED-209 and a duck, this weird kangaroo-like foe awaits you at the end of stage four.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

This boss is basically a piece of cake, if you follow these instructions. You can easily dodge its jumps and its long neck, which it extends periodically. Just keep shooting at its shimmering blue head to finish it off.

This clever system forces you to make interesting strategic decisions – do you build a larger fleet of weak ships to provide a sort of safety net, but at the risk of being overrun? Or do you rely entirely on one or two heavily armed swimming fortresses that give you a much better grip on the enemy masses but can mean a quick end if you make one mistake? The good news is that the further you get into the game, the less you will have to struggle with this decision. At the end of each level, you will receive a bonus of 3,000 credits multiplied by the number of the level you have just completed – 3,000 after the first level, 6,000 after the second, 9,000 after the third, and so on.

There are eight very different levels in all, starting with a greenish, shimmering underwater world, followed by techno-organic sections and crystal areas, to the final confrontation in a sea of fire and lava. If you master it all, the reward is not only a beautifully crafted artwork, but also a slightly irritating final message, "Congratulations! You have defeated the evil aliens. Peace on Earth is restored and mankind is free to destroy itself, once again. Great job! Now lean back and have a good 12-year-old whiskey!" Good advice. As is the one in the very next paragraph, which tells you how to get a big bag of money right at the start of the next run, "Take the smallest ship, place it in the outfit area, buy the cheapest shot, place it on the face of the shopkeeper and press the button. Voilà..."

"IN X-OUT, THE ALIENS ARE FOUGHT NOT IN SPACE, BUT UNDERWATER"

BOSS 05

DESCRIPTION

Octopi are creepy enough as it is with those big fleshy sack-like bodies they have. One that's fused to a gun is even scarier.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Keep to the far left of the screen here and watch out for its powerful shot that can destroy you with one hit. Simply move up and down, changing direction after each of its shots to dispatch it.

BOSS 06

DESCRIPTION

This behemoth looks like a lost Transformer and is as challenging as its body is shiny. You'll need to work hard if you want to best it.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This enemy moves from left to right. Avoid it and shoot at its bottom part. If the boss moves to the left, you must quickly dodge to the other side, wait for it to return and then quickly switch sides again.

BOSS 07

DESCRIPTION

It might look rather weak and pitiful due to its small size, but this particular boss can be a pain if you don't know where its weak spot is.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

This highly mobile flying station is only vulnerable on its top, and only when the conspicuous blue dot is visible. Timing is your key to victory here. It's a slog to fight, but at least it's relatively easy to beat.

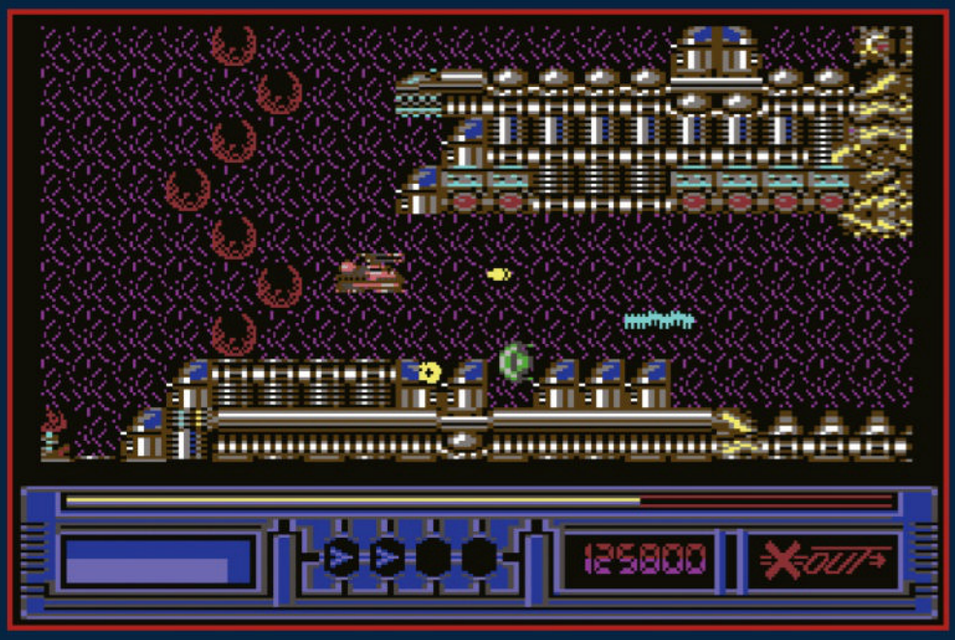
BOSS 08

DESCRIPTION:

You'd expect the last boss of the game to be imposing and it doesn't disappoint. It's a gargantuan opponent with plenty of weaponry.

HOW TO BEAT THEM:

Firstly, it is only vulnerable at the green glowing spot on its lower end, from where it will fire at you with bullets and lasers. Secondly, kamikaze fighters will continuously attack you from up and straight ahead. Good luck!



» [C64] *X-Out* was not based on an arcade game, but was a native development for the home computers of the time.

» [Amstrad CPC] *X-Out* does not offer a typical life system. Instead, you amass a fleet of ships as you progress.

In addition to its smart gameplay, *X-Out* was also impressive from a presentation point of view, with the graphics coming from Celâl Kandemiroglu, a classically trained illustrator who was responsible for many of the most famous covers of Rainbow Arts games such as *Turrican, Katakis* and *Hard 'N' Heavy*. Every once in a while, the artist, who sadly passed away in 2022, also took care of the in-game graphics himself, such as in *X-Out*, resulting in a look that is as unusual as it is wonderfully imaginative. The same goes for Chris Huelsbeck's banger of a soundtrack, which may not be one of his most famous compositions, but still makes the Amiga's sound chip shine. For reasons of memory restraints, some of the tracks are used more than once – and one composition (featured in levels five and seven) would later on start off the third world of *Turrican*.

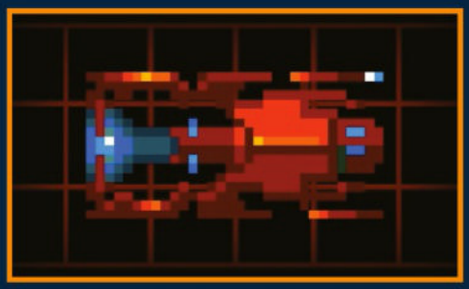
It is no wonder then that the gaming press gave *X-Out* an enthusiastic reception on release. In *ACE* 29, the game received 939 out of a possible 1,000 points. For reviewer Eugene Lacey it was "definitely one of the best shoot-'em-ups produced so far". Paul Lakin called it, "A colourful and imaginative shoot-'em-up with enough variety to guarantee a longer than average shell life," in the fourth issue of *Zero*, resulting in a final verdict of 91%. The February 1990 issue of *CVG* gave *X-Out* an overall rating of 90%, with tester Paul Rand calling it "a blaster which looks great, sounds excellent

"THERE WAS NO X-OUT IN 1989!"

UNDERPRESSURE

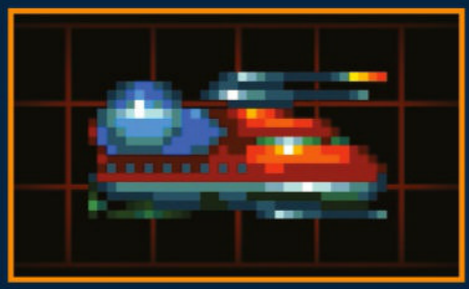
THE TRILOBITE

■ This is the starter model in *X-Out*: it's not much of a looker, and only has room for two extras and two satellites, but it also only costs 3,000 credits. This is more than enough for the first few levels, but after that you should only keep it in your hangar as a last resort. Though if you're up for a challenge, try to down a few bosses with it.



THE STINGRAY

■ The Stingray isn't going to win any beauty prizes either, but it can do some serious damage. You can attach up to five extras and three satellites, which is enough for most standard situations. At 4,000 credits each, this is a very solid recommendation. However there are better ships available if you've got the credits to spend.



THE SQUID

■ By the second half of the game at the latest, you should have at least one Squid in your watery garage. This dashing vessel can hold up to eight extras and three satellites, making it an extremely powerful vehicle in the hands of skilled players! However, it also costs 5,000 credits apiece, which makes any loss all the more painful.

and contains some of the toughest aliens in the bizz, making *X-Out* an absolute corker of a game".

The other versions of *X-Out* were also very well received, with the C64 version in particular being heaped with almost universal praise. Only the conversion for the Atari ST left some disappointed faces – more on this in the Conversion Capers panel. Either way, *X-Out* was a wonderful game. It's perhaps not one for the Criterion Collection of Amiga shmups, and its name rarely appears on lists of the best horizontal scrollers of all time, yet it deserves to be experienced. After all, its madcap scenario and clever shop system still gives it an impressive uniqueness and it's still a ton of fun to play. No wonder it's being remade.

Many thanks to Simon Krenkel, Teut Weidemann, Andreas Scholl and Michael Krosta.

THE FOUR DIFFERENT SUBMARINES YOU CAN BUY IN X-OUT

THE SHARK

The jewel in the crown of every *X-Out* owner's hangar, the Shark not only looks great, it is also a floating fortress. Its 6,000 credit hull can hold up to ten extras and a maximum of three satellites. A fully equipped Shark can easily take on any opponent, but will easily set you back 25,000 credits – losing such a precious vessel does hurt a lot.

REMASTERING X-OUT

ININ'S PRODUCT MANAGER SIMON KRENKEL ON HOW X-OUT RESURFACED

WHAT IMPROVEMENTS CAN PLAYERS EXPECT?

A ton! Firstly, the graphics have been completely overhauled and now feature native widescreen, multiple parallax layers, lots of new particle and lighting effects, and it all runs at 60 frames per second. Chris Huelsbeck has rearranged his legendary music, and there are also three all-new tracks by other musicians. Those who prefer to listen to the original Amiga and C64 compositions, can do so both in the game and in a jukebox – we recorded it in the highest possible quality directly from the original hardware. We also have made the shop much easier to use, and finally two players can now play at the same time. But the game itself remains the same! This is still the original *X-Out* experience, with all the familiar levels, ships, weapons and bosses.

Can you explain Mirror Mode to our readers?

This was just a crazy idea that was quick to implement and then turned out to be a wonderful extra challenge. In a nutshell, it's the normal game, but now it scrolls from right to left, the opposite of what you're used to. Now, you might think that the difference wouldn't be that big, because after all, it's the same enemies moving in the same way and the same levels that you're just flying through in reverse. From my own experience, however, I can say that the change in direction plays with your brain a lot more than I would have expected!

It's a completely new challenge that will put even the most seasoned shooter veterans to the test!

There is also a new cracker intro – what is this all about?

It was actually just a fun idea from our colleague Michael Krosta, but the developers loved it. Let's face it, most players back then only knew *X-Out* as a cracked pirate copy. We had fun programming a fairly authentic-looking cracker intro, with moving copper bars and sinus scrollers and everything, which even includes a typical trainer menu, with content that would be unlocked over time. For example, if a player dies several times, they will be offered an option for more health.

***X-Out Resurfaced*, developed by Kritzelkratz 3000 and distributed by ININ, will be released in early 2025 for all current systems.**

» [PC] Although the graphics have been greatly improved, they still retain the pixel charm of the original.

» [PC] *X-Out Resurfaced* allows two players to play the game at the same time – but only locally, not online.

A TRIBUTE TO FACTOR 5

AFTER FORMING IN GERMANY IN 1987, FACTOR 5 GRACED THE AMIGA WITH THE TURRICAN SERIES AND WOWED CONSOLE GAMERS WITH ITS ROGUE SQUADRON GAMES. COFOUNDER JULIAN EGGEBRECHT REMEMBERS THE GAMES THAT THE STUDIO BUILT ITS REPUTATION ON

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

Founded in Cologne in early 1987, Factor 5 first released its accomplished Amiga *R-Type* clone *Katakis* before tackling the official Amiga *R-Type* conversion.

An Amiga adaptation of Manfred Trenz's intense C64 run-and-gun *Turrican* followed, which garnered acclaim and led to a popular series that later moved from the Amiga to the SNES and Mega Drive in the early to mid-Nineties. Before then, Factor 5 pushed Commodore's 16-bit computer with its *Ballblazer* sequel *Masterblazer* and its conversion of *Bonk's Adventure – BC Kid*.

As the Nineties progressed, the firm impressed with *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures* for the SNES, and the Game Boy ports of *Animaniacs* and *Contra: The Alien Wars*. It then transitioned into PlayStation development with the best-seller *Star Wars: Rebel Assault II* and the underrated *Ballblazer Champions*.

In 1998, Factor 5 revisited the *Star Wars* franchise with its flight combat title *Rogue Squadron*, which received two popular sequels in the subsequent decade. Its year 2000 N64 titles *Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine* and *Star Wars: Episode I – Battle For Naboo* also did well.

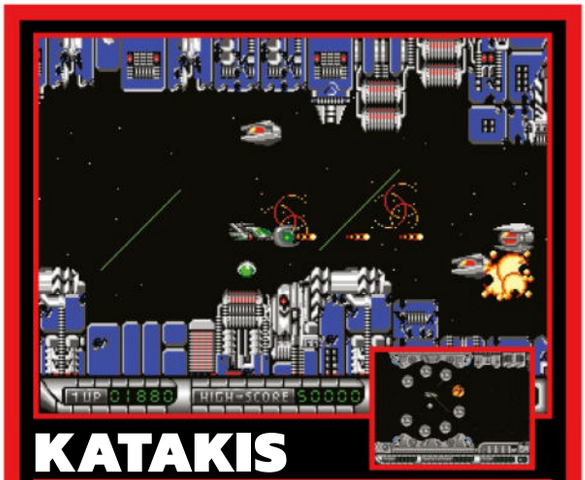
Following *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron III – Rebel Strike*'s 2003 launch, Factor 5 had several projects cancelled, including two *Rogue Squadron* titles, *Porco Rosso*, *Animal Wars* and a *Superman* game. The studio got its dragon combat title *Lair* published in 2007, but not before unwanted changes were made to it.

After closing its doors in 2009, Factor 5 returned in 2017, and since then the renowned studio has focussed on producing remastered versions of its *Turrican* games for modern platforms. ✱

» [Wii] Here's an image from Factor 5's cancelled Wii *Star Wars* game, showing a lightsaber duel with Darth Vader.

JULIAN EGGEBRECHT

■ Soon after starting his first games project with Internal Byte Systems in 1989, Julian jumped ship to publisher Rainbow Arts, where he stayed until 1991 before joining Factor 5. Julian is still a driving force behind the studio to this day, and is also the director of Netflix's Technology Research Group.



KATAKIS

AMIGA, VARIOUS · 1988

Developed by Factor 5 for the Amiga while Manfred Trenz developed the C64 version, Factor 5's *Katakis* is an unashamed tribute to Irem's hit coin-op *R-Type*. Similarities aside, the Amiga homage differentiates itself with some unique bosses and level designs.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"Lutz Osterkorn saw *R-Type* in the arcade and fell in love with it. He basically told the others in Factor 5 they had to do something like that. Hence *Katakis* came about. They were so much in love with *R-Type* that Achime Möller even bought an arcade board of an *R-Type* coin-op, which of course is the reason why in the very early version of *Katakis* the ship is pixel for pixel identical to the arcade game's."

R-TYPE

AMIGA, VARIOUS · 1989

Considering that Factor 5 only had three months to develop *R-Type* for the Commodore Amiga it's an incredibly accurate conversion, right down to its in-game soundtrack, which marked Chris Hülsbeck's first collaboration with the studio.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"Activision UK bought the rights to the *R-Type* home conversions, and when it saw *Katakis* being advertised in Germany it immediately threatened Rainbow Arts with a cease and desist. Nintendo had recently sued Rainbow Arts over *Giana Sisters*, so it couldn't afford not to release *Katakis* because *Giana Sisters* had been withdrawn. So they agreed to rename *Katakis* and bring it out a year later. Then Manfred Trenz and Factor 5 had to do the official C64 and Amiga *R-Type* conversions for free."

MASTERBLAZER

AMIGA, VARIOUS · 1990

Originally an Internal Byte Systems game, *Masterblazer* has coding and music from Factor 5's Achime Möller and Chris Hülsbeck respectively, so technically it's a collaboration. Based on the Atari 8-bit future sport title *Ballblazer*, *Masterblazer* aesthetically enhances the original's vehicle-based one-on-one soccer gameplay.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"I had friends who were programmers and artists, and we wanted to make games. I was pretty good at English, so I cold-called Lucasfilm Games in the US. I said we would love to do an Amiga *Ballblazer* update, but it had just given away the rights to Rainbow Arts – its distribution partners in Germany. So I drove down to Dusseldorf to see Rainbow Arts. I said that my group in Hildesheim wanted to do an Amiga *Ballblazer* sequel called *Masterblazer*, and it said to do that."

AWESOME ADDITIONS

HOW MASTERBLAZER IMPROVES ON BALLBLAZER

TOURNAMENT MODE

Like its name suggests, Tournament Mode sees one or two players and AI competitors playing each other in matches to decide who wins a tournament.

ROTOFOIL RACES

Instead of putting the ball in your rival's net, Rotofoil Races involve passing through goals, avoiding balls and reaching the finish line first.

OPPONENT BIOS

You can research your competition in *Masterblazer* in the game's museum, where you can find histories of some of the Rotofoil pilots you'll face.

SHIP STATS

As well as useful info on your rivals, *Masterblazer*'s museum gives you the low-down on the Rotofoil craft that you zoom around in during matches.

TOP TUTORIAL

The rules of *Masterblazer* aren't that obvious, so it's worth checking out its Demo Mode, as this gives you illustrated step-by-step instructions on how to play.

TURRICAN

AMIGA, VARIOUS · 1990

■ Factor 5's Amiga version of Manfred Trenz's intense C64 run-and-gun is worth the admission price for the addition of Chris Hülsbeck's soundtrack alone. It also boasts smoother scrolling, nicer-looking visuals and cool technical effects such as colour fades.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"Two months into *Masterblazer* I jumped ship to Rainbow Arts. I found out that Manfred had a new project on the C64 with a little guy that could run around, and it would scroll in all directions. It needed a producer, so Rainbow Arts suggested me because Manfred and I got along well, and that project became *Turrican*. I had to figure out how we got an Amiga version, so I met with Factor 5. Holger Schmidt from Factor 5 had done a demo that scrolled on the Amiga in all directions, so I suggested he do the Amiga *Turrican*. The rest is history."

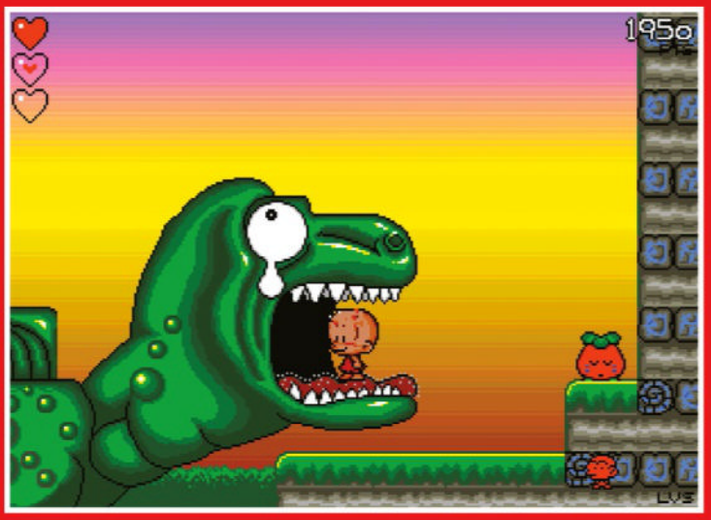
TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT

AMIGA, VARIOUS · 1991

■ The Amiga's power is really shown off in *Turrican*'s sequel. Chris Hülsbeck's impressive in-game music is coupled with speech samples and insane numbers of on-screen colours. As with *Turrican*, the sequel has multiple power-ups, epic exploration and accomplished level designs.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"With *Turrican II* we all sat down and said why didn't we really go for the strength of each machine? That's why the later parts of *Turrican II*, especially, are quite different between the C64 and Amiga. We all collaborated on the levels. Manfred didn't have a problem with that, so some are his, some are the graphic artist Andreas Escher's, some are mine and some are Holger's. So it was much more of a mix of everybody's designs, and I think that was why it was a stronger game."



BC KID

AMIGA, VARIOUS · 1992

■ Near identical to the PC Engine original – *Bonk's Adventure*, Factor 5's *BC Kid* sees its prehistoric platforming hero negotiating levels using various mechanics, taking out enemies and bosses with a variety of attacks, and powering-up in a variety of interesting ways.

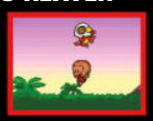
JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"Hudson Soft thought there must be an untapped market in Europe, so it invited us over to Japan. It suggested we converted one of its games for the Amiga, because we knew it well. It asked us which game we wanted to do, and I immediately said *Bomberman*, but unfortunately it was already assigned to a different German developer. So my second most favourite game from Hudson Soft was *Bonk's Adventure*, which became *BC Kid*. We had a total blast doing that, and I think it came out really well."

MEMORABLE MECHANICS

THE PREHISTORIC PLATFORMER'S FUN FEATURES

HEADBANGER'S HEAVEN



■ Head-butting opponents is an effective way of dispatching them providing they're in close range, and you can even play keepy-up with them after you butt them into the air!

SPIN TO WIN

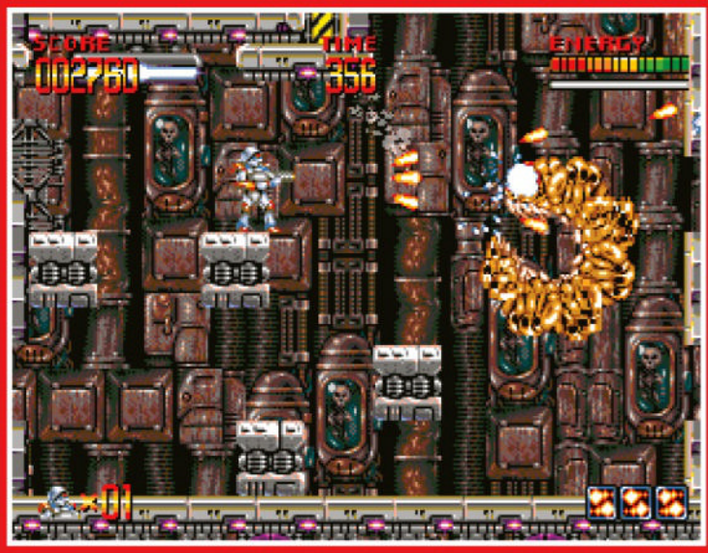
■ Jumping on foes' heads drains your energy in *BC Kid*, unless you spin its hero so that his head is facing downwards. Then you can take out any opponents that he lands on.

WALL CRAWLER

■ Oddly, *BC Kid*'s hero can climb walls by first gripping on to them with his teeth, and then alternating between jumping up and reattaching himself with his pearly whites.

HEART TO HEART

■ The health of *BC Kid*'s hero is depicted as hearts, and collecting more renews his energy. Hearts can be found in hard to reach places and by bouncing on certain flowers.



MEGA TURRICAN

MEGA DRIVE, AMIGA · 1993

■ Developed by Factor 5 for the Mega Drive as *Mega Turrican* and co-converted by the studio for the Amiga as *Turrican III*, the game differentiates itself from the earlier titles with the introduction of a physics-based grappling hook that's used to reach high-up places.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"*Mega Turrican* started out as *Turrican III* on the Amiga, but then Rainbow Arts said to move it to the Mega Drive. Relatively late in its development, one of the programming groups around Chris Huelsbeck – Keiko – asked if we would be OK about them doing an Amiga conversion of *Mega Turrican*, and we said that was alright. In the meantime, the publisher for *Mega Turrican*, Konami, said it was working on a Mega Drive *Contra* title, and it didn't want to have another shooter that was similar in the same line-up. So we suddenly didn't have a publisher anymore. Then Keiko's *Turrican III* for the Amiga got finished, so we said to just publish it because the Amiga was going under. That's why everyone thinks *Mega Turrican* was the later game, but it was finished way, way earlier."

AWESOME ARMAMENTS

THE BEST WEAPONS IN THE INTENSE RUN-AND-GUN

LETHAL LASERS
■ These come in the form of a steady stream of green laser balls that shoot out in front of you.

REBOUND SHOTS
■ Best described as bouncing bombs, these hop along flat surfaces until they find their target.

SCATTERED SHOTS
■ This sends bullets out in multiple directions, and the more it's powered-up, the wider the spread.

SMART BOMBS
■ Similar to the Power Lines in the earlier games, Smart Bombs take out every foe on the screen.

HOMING MISSILES
■ Like their name suggests, Homing Missiles lock on to nearby enemies and go off in their faces.

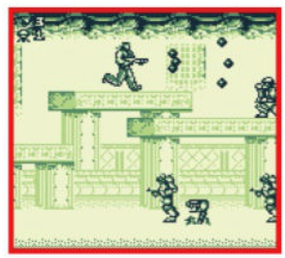
SUPER TURRICAN

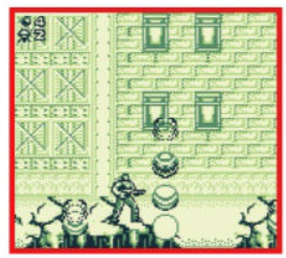
SNES · 1993

■ With just four worlds, *Super Turrican* is short but sweet, although having a Freeze Beam instead of a deadly Lightning Whip like the earlier games increases its challenge. Its levels are reworked stages from the first two *Turrican* titles.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"The reason *Super Turrican* was a mix of the first *Turrican* and *Turrican II* was that Accolade had done such bad conversions of *Turrican* on the Mega Drive. So we wanted to do something in the style of the Amiga games while also using the SNES' Mode 7 effects. We were shooting for an eight megabit cartridge, because we needed that much space. If you think about it, eight megabits is about the combined size of *Turrican* and *Turrican II* on the Amiga. But then when the game was just about six megabits, and with plenty still to develop, Rainbow Arts said that it couldn't find a publisher. It was panicking, and said we had to get it into four megabits. Unfortunately it held the purse strings, so we cut it down from six megabits and essentially dumped the rest of it."





CONTRA: THE ALIEN WARS

GAME BOY · 1994

■ *Contra: The Alien Wars* is so faithful that it feels like playing the SNES original on a black-and-white TV. In terms of gameplay, Factor 5's portable run-and-gun is crammed full of interesting bosses, level designs and power-ups.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"Holger finished *Super Turrican* and went on to *Contra: The Alien Wars*, and he just had a blast. With any hardware we got we thought about what it could do, and we always built our own development kits. One of our best friends was in the German secret service, in the hardware division, and it had gadgets to do reverse-engineering of stuff. What he initially did was build our development kits for the Amiga, and then when the Game Boy came along he did the same for it. The advantage with that we really knew the hardware inside and out. It was very different to buying a development kit and official documentation from Nintendo. We knew the timings of each individual chip, and really knew down to the last detail what you could do. *Contra: The Alien Wars* definitely profited from that."

INDIANA JONES' GREATEST ADVENTURES

SNES · 1994

Counterpart to the SNES *Super Star Wars* platformers, *Greatest Adventures* adds extra spice to the established formula with impressive Mode 7 challenges. Rather than just focussing on one movie, *Greatest Adventures* has you playing through the entire original trilogy.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"When we attended CES for the first time we met the LucasArts group at their booth, and they said they wanted to work with us. We said great, and they asked us what we wanted to work on. I said *Star Wars*, obviously, but they said it wasn't available. So I said why didn't we do Indiana Jones? I wanted to do the whip using physics, but LucasArts said no because it wouldn't look as nice as a hand-drawn animation. That's a huge regret, but then again that game got us a really deep relationship with LucasArts."

SET-PIECE SURVIVAL

HOW TO BEAT THE INDY EPIC'S SET-PIECE STAGES

BOULDER DASH

From the beginning of *Raiders*, this challenge has you running from a huge rolling boulder, and unlike in the movie there are obstacles to avoid.

CRAFTY RAFTING

Based on the *Temple Of Doom* scene where Indy speeds down a snowy forested mountain in a life raft, this stage adds chasms for you to leap over.

MINE-CART MANIA

This level takes inspiration from *Temple*'s mine-cart scene. You have to shoot obstructions out of the way and steer clear of damaged tracks.

BIPLANE BOTHER

An into-the-screen version of *Last Crusade*'s zeppelin escape scene. This stage has you shooting down Nazi aircraft over a Mode 7 landscape.

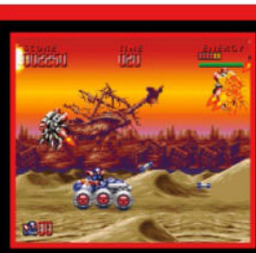
TANKING IT

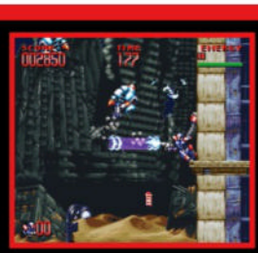
In *Last Crusade*, Indy has to fight off Nazis holding his dad hostage in a tank. This level pays tribute to that with a tank-top beat-'em-up!

ANIMANIACS

GAME BOY · 1995

Another of Factor 5's Game Boy conversions for Konami, *Animaniacs* was ported from the Mega Drive game rather than the completely different SNES title of the same name. As a concession to cartridge space, the Game Boy *Animaniacs* lacks one full level and parts of four others from the Mega Drive original. That said, what's there in the Game Boy version looks and plays remarkably like the game it's based on. The beauty of *Animaniacs* is that you can switch between three player characters with different skills. Yakko can stun foes with his paddleball and can push or pull useful or obstructive objects around, Wakko has a wooden mallet that lets him flick switches, light fuses and break things with, and Dot can blow kisses to persuade certain characters to help her out. At the end of each of the game's platforming stages there's a boss fight, with the last of these fought against the three heroes' archenemies Pinky & The Brain.





SUPER TURRICAN 2

SNES · 1995

A tour-de-force of 16-bit game design, *Super Turrican 2* combines the best power-ups and mechanics from the previous *Turrican* titles in a more linear format. The sequel is also notable for its impressive third-person perspective Mode 7 stages.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"*Super Turrican 2* was our revenge for *Super Turrican*! We had 16 megabits, and we could do whatever we wanted. It was also controversial. Konami always told us that we had to be more linear, and we were done with the sprawling-ness of the earlier *Turrican* games anyway. So we thought we would design a very much Japanese-style game and try to max out the Super Nintendo. Amiga *Turrican* fans didn't like it because it was linear, but I think it stands on its own. It's a much tighter game, it's shorter, and for that it really did everything that you could do on the SNES."

STAR WARS: REBEL ASSAULT II – THE HIDDEN EMPIRE

PLAYSTATION · 1996

Factor 5's PlayStation version boasts polygons instead of FMV and remastered live-action sequences. Each of its stages features a shoot-'em-up challenge or another test of skill set in the *Star Wars* universe.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"LucasArts just finished *Rebel Assault II* for the PC as full-motion video was on the way out. But I suggested that with the special editions of the original *Star Wars* movies coming out why didn't it let us take the effects for *Rebel Assault II* and completely reinvent them. We said that we would redo everything that we could with polygons and remaster the live-action sequences from the original master tapes. That was why *Rebel Assault II* was a completely different beast on the PlayStation. With polygon TIE-fighters we could give them different attack patterns, which they couldn't have with the FMV. We also had camera switches between the cockpit and outside view. Everybody says it looks like a prototype of *Rogue Squadron*, and if you look at who worked on the game then it's no wonder."

EPIC EXPERIENCES

TOP CHALLENGES FROM FACTOR 5'S STAR WARS TITLE

ON-FOOT ONSLAUGHT

A corridor set shoot-out against a couple of the Empire's Stormtroopers. Factor 5's PlayStation version lets you play this with Konami's Hyper Blaster lightgun.

X-WING EXCITEMENT

As one of two X-wing pilots you have to take on a whole fleet of TIE Fighters in an unrelenting shoot-'em-up. You get points for accuracy at the end of the stage.

MILLENNIUM FIGHTING

If you survive an obstacle course based in labyrinthine tunnels, this challenge next tasks you with flying through confined spaces while picking off Imperial craft.

3D DEATH CHASE

Another obstacle course, except that here you're riding a speeder bike in the forests of Endor. There's also target practice, where you pick off deadly wildlife.

INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER DELUXE

MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS · 1996

Converted from Konami's popular SNES title, Factor 5's Mega Drive adaptation has all the sophistication and fun features of its inspiration. 16-bit football games from the time often limited you to passing, booting the ball and shooting at your opponent's goal, but *International Superstar Soccer Deluxe* additionally allows you to pull off tricks such as back heel passes, dummies and overhead kicks. It's also crammed full of different modes, ranging from training, penalty kick shoot-outs and friendlies to World Cup, European Cup and World League tournaments. It even allows you to play in recreations of notable historical matches. There are 36 national teams to play for and there's a wealth of options to choose from pre-match, including 16 different formations and eight strategies. You can play CPU opponents, which tend not to take prisoners, or take on a friend, which as you might expect, is far more fun.

BALLBLAZER CHAMPIONS

PLAYSTATION · 1997

What's impressive about *Ballblazer Champions* is that Factor 5's sequel still feels like the Lucasfilm Games original despite adding a range of collectable weapons and Rotofoil upgrades between matches.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"The sad thing was that LucasArts didn't know how to market *Ballblazer Champions* at all. It was actually a pretty good game, but it was a total flop. LucasArts didn't have the money to market it, because the marketing dollars were always tied to the *Star Wars* titles. One word explains the new features in *Champions*: *WipEout*. When we were working out how to do a modern *Ballblazer* we decided to go with the aesthetics from *WipEout* but have 3D stadiums with lots of levels. So it was thinking about how to use 3D without a flat plane. Then how did we mix up the gameplay even further? Well, why not use weapons? So that was the thinking, although the weapons really came from *WipEout* too."

STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON

NINTENDO 64, PC · 1998

■ Factor 5's mission-based hit differentiates itself from earlier *Star Wars* games by locating challenges on planets instead of in space. Besides combat, it tasks you with rescue and reconnaissance missions.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"We finally convinced LucasArts to give us a green light for *Return To Fractalus*, but it relatively quickly became *Rogue Squadron* because it needed us to do the third *Star Wars* game in a deal with Nintendo. We didn't want the problems you get with completely free flight space games that have 360-degree flight, so we had to figure out how to do X-wings and Y-wings with car-like controls that suggested that you were flying. I wanted to have the feeling that the Atari *Star Wars* arcade game gave me where I could intuitively jump in and have fun. That mixed with the mission structure from *X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter* and the free-flight feeling from *Rescue On Fractalus* was *Rogue Squadron*."

COMPELLING CHALLENGES

MUST-PLAY MISSIONS FROM THE STAR WARS SHOOTER

AMBUSH ON MOS EISLEY
■ A routine patrol goes awry after Imperial droids are spotted attacking a homestead. Destroy these and then dispatch the TIE Bombers that follow.

RENDEZVOUS ON BARKESH
■ Protection duty in occupied territory was never going to be easy, and in this mission you have to guard a whole convoy from gun towers and AT-STs.

THE SEARCH FOR NONNAH
■ In this search and rescue mission, you pilot an A-wing and face TIE Fighters that are after the same downed rebel ship as you and your squadron.

DEFECTION AT CORRELLIA
■ In this moon-lit mission, you defend a city from TIE Bombers and an AT-AT from the seat of a Snow Speeder, and then escort a defector to safety.

LIBERATION OF GEFRARD V
■ While a pair of Y-wings try to disable Empire yachts, you have to take out heavy artillery in your X-wing in order to give them a fighting chance.

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

NINTENDO 64, PC · 2000

■ Designed to replicate *Tomb Raider* with Indy as the hero, Factor 5's *Infernal Machine* is an ambitious attempt to create a 3D adventure for the popular protagonist on Nintendo's console.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"LucasArts asked Hal Barwood to do *Tomb Raider* on the PC with *Indiana Jones*, but it paired Hal up with weak underlying technology. The N64 didn't have a *Tomb Raider* title, and *Ocarina Of Time* had just come out. So I thought that if we redid *Infernal Machine* with our tech and the *Ocarina* controls then it might actually be a really good game. I suggested that LucasArts ask Nintendo to publish it as a first-party title, but once we were close to being done the N64 was dying fast. So LucasArts did a deal with Blockbuster where it would rent them as an exclusive, but it had an absolute deadline and there was no way that we could make it. That was why it was so buggy."

STAR WARS: EPISODE I – BATTLE FOR NABOO

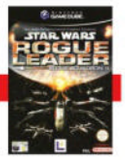
N64, PC · 2000

■ Considering that it was Factor 5's next flight action title after *Rogue Squadron*, it's not surprising that *Battle For Naboo* takes its lead from its predecessor. That's not to say that *Naboo* doesn't innovate, however, as it introduces levels where you fly at ground level, and it incorporates missions where the enemies are water-borne. Of course, it also differs visually due to being based on *Episode I* rather than the original trilogy, and this follows through to you piloting the Jedi Starfighter and other craft from the newer movie, as well as fighting ships from the more recent film.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"We started *Naboo* right after finishing *Rogue Squadron* in January of 1999. We already had the Naboo Starfighter, because we had hidden it in *Rogue Squadron* a year before. I had also seen a lot of artwork for *Phantom Menace* years earlier, and we saw the last three cuts just before the movie was almost done. There was much more elaborate stuff in the *Battle Of Naboo* that was cut later on, and that helped us a little bit in terms of the design of the game."

STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON II – ROGUE LEADER



GAMECUBE · 2001

Naturally, as *Rogue Squadron II* was made for the GameCube rather than the N64, its visuals are far more impressive than those of its predecessor. One of the sequel's more interesting innovations is the ability to send instructions to your wingmen using the GameCube's d-pad. It has you flying classic *Star Wars* ships, including the X-wing, A-wing, Y-wing, B-wing, Snow Speeder, Sky Hopper and Millennium Falcon – and once you unlock a level with its default craft you can replay it with any available ship. Like the original, *Rogue Squadron II* employs a radar mechanic that allows you to navigate towards off-screen targets.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"The medal system was successful in *Rogue Squadron* so we kept it for *Rogue Squadron II*. It was inspired by *Blast Corps* from Rare. It's a hidden gem of the N64 library and it has the medal system. The typical arcade thing would be to have Easy, Normal and Hard, but we didn't necessarily want to make something like that because you always played on the same difficulty. But we still wanted to make things more challenging by making these achievements possible."

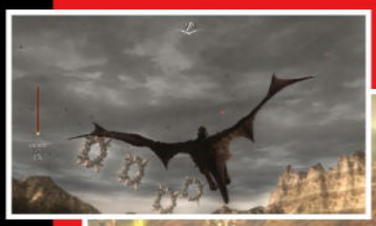
STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON III – REBEL STRIKE

GAMECUBE ·2003

In a departure for the series, there are FPS-style missions in *Rogue Squadron III*, where you get out of your ship and take on Empire forces with your blaster. You also get to pilot ground-based vehicles, and there's a great two-player co-op mode.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"The original design for *Rogue Squadron II* was a combination of *Rogue Leader* and *Rebel Strike*, but we only had nine months until the damn thing had to come out, because we were a launch title. So everything in *Rebel Strike* was the stuff that we had to cut from *Rogue Leader*, and you noticed that. It maybe wasn't the wisest idea to do a sequel quite frankly. With the Battle Of Endor, the original idea was that we would cut back and forth between the space battle and the forest battle. That was the cool thing about the end of *Return Of The Jedi*, the cutting back and forth. But what we ended up with was the flight part in *Rogue Leader* and the ground part in *Rebel Strike*."



LAIR

PLAYSTATION 3 · 2007

Lair's flight combat missions are fun if you use the analogue stick instead of the motion controls; however its ground melee combat and dragon versus dragon challenges work less well.

JULIAN'S MEMORIES

"My original pitch was to take the visuals from *The Lord Of The Rings* and do the game with a mercenary character. We were going to have some flight combat, but you would also go from the sky to the ground, get off the dragon and do melee combat. What happened was that we were in development hell, and then the budget got out of control. The only way to de-risk it was to treat the dragons like X-wings and have a *Rogue Squadron* level structure. But as you weren't flying at the speed of an X-wing the gameplay became less interesting, and finally Sony said we were going to be the showcase for the PS3's motion controls. When *Lair* came out there was a huge backlash. Six months later Sony shipped a patch for stick controls, but that was way too late. It was a pretty horrible time. *Lair* should have been a completely different game."

TURRICAN TIME

A ROUND UP OF THE LATEST TURRICAN TITLES

Turrican Flashback was released for the PS4 and Switch in 2020. It incorporated perfectly replicated versions of *Turrican*, *Turrican II*, *Mega Turrican* and *Super Turrican*, all with visual filters, save states and a rewind option. *Turrican Anthology I* graced the same systems in 2021, and included *Turrican I* and *II*, *Super Turrican* with cut content restored and a score attack *Mega Turrican*. *Turrican Anthology II* launched simultaneously, and contained *Turrican III*, *Mega Turrican* – both original and restored versions, *Super Turrican 2* and a score attack *Super Turrican*, the last of which arrived on Antstream as a standalone title in 2024.

Super Smash TV

AAAARGH, THUMB CRAMP!

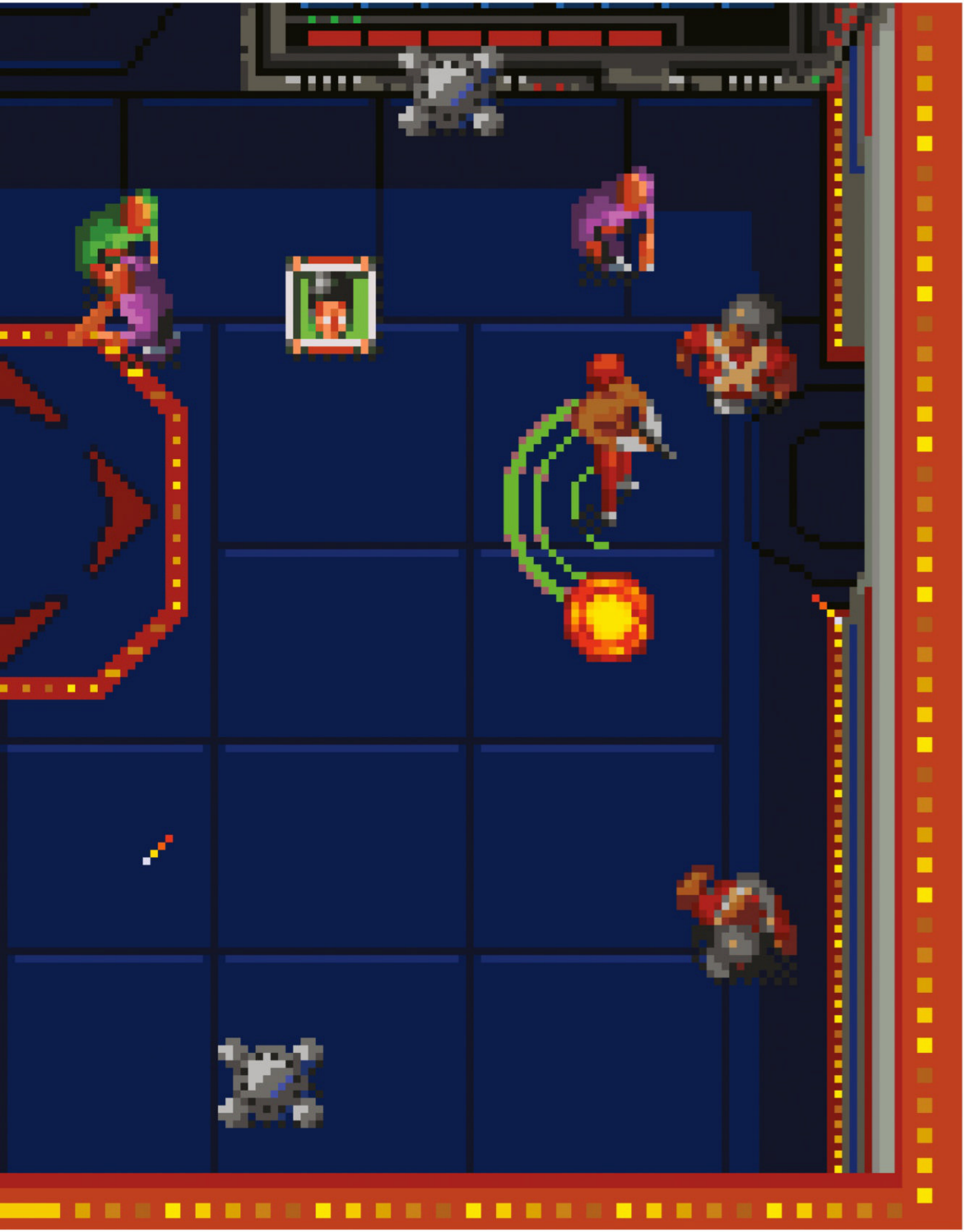
» SNES » 1992 » BEAM SOFTWARE

Sometimes, the right joystick in your hand can make a huge amount of difference to how much you enjoy the game you're playing. That's never been more true than playing *Super Smash TV* on the SNES.

Eugene Jarvis' arcade classic is a twin-stick shooter like his earlier game *Robotron: 2084* and it's no less chaotic and fun to play. As was often the case at the time, *Smash TV*'s popularity in arcades meant it was converted to every home system you could imagine, from the C64 and the Spectrum to the Mega Drive and Amiga, and they were all largely pants to play. The reason? It was incredibly hard to emulate that twin-stick setup in the home, especially as many console joypads were limited by both the amount of buttons and their placement. Home computers had it even worse, as they typically featured controllers with even fewer buttons.

Fortunately, the Super Nintendo had no such problems, thanks to a joypad that was not only surprisingly comfortable to hold, but also loaded with conveniently placed buttons. Like *Street Fighter II* on the SNES, *Super Smash TV* felt made for the console as its four face buttons made a brilliant substitute for the arcade machine's second joystick. Every other version I had played was massively compromised by the system's button layout, or lack of extra buttons, but the SNES had no such issues.

That's not to say it wasn't perfect, mind. I used to play the game regularly with my best mate Paul and we both got very good and would compete to see who could pick up the most prizes in-game and nab the most points between levels. Once you reach *Super Smash TV*'s third arena, thumb cramp becomes a real problem and it's endurance, not ability, that becomes all important. It wouldn't be long before an on-screen avatar began flagging, indicating that their owner was suffering from 'numb thumb' as we called it. That player was typically me and it wouldn't be unusual to receive some friendly ribbing from Paul at the level's end while I nursed my tender thumb.



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SPECTRUM HOLOBYTE

» **DEVELOPER:** MICROPROSE UK

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE

» **GENRE:** PLATFORM

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

NAME: F-15 STRIKE EAGLE (PICTURED)
RELEASED: 1993
PLATFORM: GAME GEAR

PIRATES! GOLD
RELEASED: 1993
PLATFORM: AMIGA CD32

X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP
RELEASED: 1995
PLATFORM: DOS

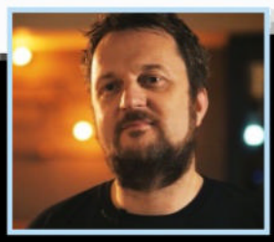
» [Mega Drive] As well as being able to slide, Tinhead could jump. Holding down the Jump button lets him go higher and farther.

» [Mega Drive] As well as displaying the number of lives, batteries and the score, *Tinhead* also showed the direction of the shot and how many there were.

THE MAKING OF

INSPIRED BY SONIC, THE TALENTED TEAM BEHIND TINHEAD REACHED FOR THE STARS AND CREATED AN ACTION-PACKED PLATFORMER FEATURING A RESOURCEFUL ROBOT CAPABLE OF FIRING BULLETS FROM THE TOP OF HIS HEAD. DESIGNER RICHARD LEMARCHAND AND PRODUCER STUART WHYTE BRING US UP TO SPEED

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES



■ Stuart Whyte has had a long career in videogames having worked for Bullfrog, Lionhead and, more recently, PlayStation London Studio. He's also a board member of videogame trade body TIGA.

■ Richard Lemarchand worked at Naughty Dog as a lead game designer on the *Uncharted* series. He helped to create the game series *Gex* and *Soul Reaver* at Crystal Dynamics, and now teaches full time in the USC Games program.

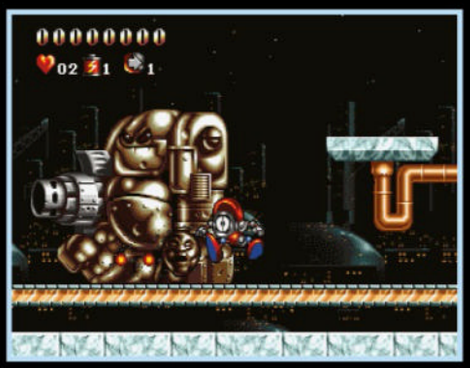
When *Sonic The Hedgehog* was released for the Sega Mega Drive in June 1991, it injected fresh life into the platform genre. Aside from introducing a character who became a cultural icon, the lightning fast, visually vibrant game introduced new play mechanics and took presentation to a whole new level.

It also led to a surge of copycat platformers based around mascots and one of those was Tinhead, a cutesy robot who could whizz around various worlds while shooting bullets out of the top of his head. Developed by MicroProse UK, it was published by Spectrum HoloByte and, for a very long time, it was a Mega Drive exclusive.

Tinhead was designed by Richard Lemarchand who had cut his teeth helping to port *F-15 Strike Eagle II* to the Mega Drive. "Our tiny team was tasked with making a high-quality platform game for the Mega Drive," he says. "*Sonic*'s high-speed gameplay was a particular inspiration."

MicroProse's idea was to simply make a title for mainstream gamers that would do well commercially but the team also wanted to flex their artistic muscle. "We were a pretty inexperienced team who just wanted to make a cool game," says the game's producer Stuart Whyte. Other inspiration came from *Mario* games and *Jetpac*.

» [Mega Drive] Richard studied physics and philosophy at Oxford University so many passwords were scientists, philosophers or particle names. One was Balrog – the name of Stuart Whyte's adventure column in *Amstrad Action*.



» [Mega Drive] At the end of each world is a guardian who needs to be eliminated in order for players to progress to the next one.

» [Mega Drive] The game had some superb animation: if Tinhead is on the edge of a platform, he'll wobble as he tries to gain his balance.

> "WE WERE A PRETTY INEXPERIENCED TEAM WHO JUST WANTED TO MAKE A COOL GAME"
> **STUART WHYTE**

From the start of development in 1992, the game was earmarked for a Christmas 1993 release but, although work progressed well, important changes were made along the way. The choice of a robot as the central character, for example, developed over time. "Tinhead was originally called Waldo and he wasn't a robot," explains Richard. "He was a 'Waldo suit' – think the Power Loader in *Aliens* or a mecha like in *Evangelion* or *Pacific Rim*."

As such, the original character design was very different to the one you see in-game today. It had, Richard adds, "A cylindrical body with legs poking out of the bottom, little arms with robo-pincer hands, a wraparound screen where his eyes were displayed and a shiny red dome on top." This made the character a lot less anthropomorphic than the final version. "But it looked more like Dusty Bin," Stuart says. The design nonetheless lent itself to some intriguing experiments. "We were working on one game mechanic where Waldo, when dashing along, could jump in the air, retract his legs into his can-like body and then slam down, sliding along like an ice hockey puck sending enemies flying," Richard says. It also allowed the team to riff on Sunsoft's run-and-gun *Blaster Master* platformer design from 1988. "The idea was that, at any point in the gameplay, you could press a combo button and Waldo would power down and settle on the ground," Richard continues. "His head would pop open and a tiny person would jump out and run around. They'd have very limited abilities and no offensive capability but they'd be able to get into tight spaces to flip switches and collect things."

As development progressed, however, the list of desired features was slimmed down and the character became more of a straightforward robot. MicroProse had also got jittery about using the Waldo name. "Head office in the States was justifiably worried about the potential of *Where's Waldo?* branding confusion," Richard says. The game was briefly retitled *Electronic* ▶

TINHEAD TRANSLATIONS

TINHEAD WAS ALSO EARMARKED FOR OTHER PLATFORMS

SNES

■ Gordon Fong was handed the programming reins for the SNES version of *Tinhead* and the game was completed. For commercial reasons, it wasn't released by MicroProse but a ROM image knocked around the internet shortly afterwards and it finally got an airing as a physical cartridge release in 2019 courtesy of Piko Interactive. Since the SNES gamepad had more buttons, all three shots – horizontal, diagonal and bouncing – could be played in quick succession.

ATARI JAGUAR

■ A Jaguar version was considered but didn't get past the initial investigation stage. Even so, a version was actually made. "The Mega Drive and Jaguar both had 68000 processors at their heart so, when Nick Thompson was working on a *Gunship 2000* port to Jaguar, he – for fun (and to show off the power of this new console) – actually had a version of *Tinhead* running in the helicopter instrument panel in *Gunship 2000*," says *Tinhead*'s producer Stuart Whyte.

AMIGA SYSTEMS

■ Although Game Gear, Master System and Game Boy versions were canned before any code was committed, versions were underway for the Amiga 500, Amiga 1200 and Amiga CD32. Gordon Fong was again tasked with coding but the ports were cancelled during development because the platforms had become less viable. "I wish *Tinhead* had seen a wider release," Richard Lemarchand laments. "The game is a lasting tribute to all our lovely colleagues and our youthful idealism."

Hardware images by Evan Amos

» [Mega Drive] Short snappy puzzles needed to be solved in each of the four different worlds along with vehicles to ride and hidden places with goodies to pick-up.

» [Mega Drive] *Tinhead*'s graphics popped from the screen. "I think that so much of what people respond to positively in *Tinhead* is Trevor Slater's genius," says Richard.

» [Mega Drive] There were lots of monsters to quickly dispatch such as the floating Orbus, spinning Krystal, leaping Rokk, fast-moving Spike, slow Gunky and flying Saw-sir.

▶ *Kid* then *Tinhead*, "With the footnote, 'Until marketing (or someone else) can think of a better name,'" Stuart continues. The design also shifted, with the focus then placed on the robot's head-mounted ball-bearing blaster.

Throughout this time, Jim Gardner had been hard at work nailing the code and the game's engine while Trevor Slater was working his magic on the visuals. The original idea was to have six worlds but, with money being tight and to reduce schedule slippage, this was pared back to four, leaving gamers to navigate Crystal World, Space Port, Star Hulk and Inctec Planet, each with their own identities and quirks.

> "I DIDN'T EVEN REALISE IT HAD COME OUT, UNTIL STU TOLD ME ABOUT SEEING IT IN A STORE!"
> **RICHARD LEMARCHAND**

Creating these was largely and originally down to the trio of Jim, Trevor and Richard but programmer Nick Thompson joined later to lead the coding side, with Richard saying all four deserve equal credit for the game's concept and design. Paul Dunning and Chris Newcombe also came aboard as did more graphics artists. Stuart supported the core team about a year into development and they'd bounce ideas off other MicroProse colleagues, "Mike Brunton, Peter Moreland, Andy Hieke and Paul Hibbard-Teal, to name just a few," Richard adds. But there was no doubt that, without Trevor, the game wouldn't have been quite the same. His graphics stood the game apart from many rival mascot-fronted platformers and Richard says so much of what people respond to positively in Tinhead is down to the artist's genius.

"Originally, Trevor was going to do all of the graphics and animation in the game from the player-character (with all the different powers) to backgrounds and all the enemies and collectibles," Richard continues. "But when it became clear there weren't enough Trevor-hours in the working day to get everything done before the end of the Nineties, we got a ton of amazing help from the extended MicroProse art community, including Allan Holloway, John Reitze, Mark Wilson, Paul Ayliffe and Theo Pantazi."

Trevor and the other artists created the graphics using DPaint on the Amiga, with Richard saying Trevor was an absolute master of the shaded highlight with a jaw-dropping sense of colour. "He was a self-proclaimed pixel-pusher who lovingly crafted every last colourful square, studying the results on a CRT TV to get the most out of the light dissipation and blurring that turns a blocky grid of pixel art into a beautifully softened, rounded image of much higher apparent resolution," says Richard. "Trevor was a true artist with a strong sense of personal style that he could flex in so many different directions. He really loved the art direction we embraced which had a strongly stylised early Nineties cartoon look. It often had the glamour of pre-rendered 3D graphics, even though it was all pixel art."

The artists were able to take Richard's "terrible little doodles of the game's enemies in my notebook" and bring them beautifully to life. A handful of cutscenes were also created to help tell the story – that of Tinhead being the metallic Guardian Of The Edge Of The Universe seeking to rescue the night sky's stars from an evil intergalactic goblin called Grim Squidge who had vacuumed-cleaned them up using his spaceship and scattered them far and wide.

The tale was, as Richard attests, "Very elementary." But it was a whimsical and offbeat bit of science-fantasy that really fit the post-acid house, indie comics and Japanese anime and games culture that we were all immersed in," he adds. "I think the colourful electronic dance music mood of the times came through nicely in the graphics and the audio."

By early 1993, the game was evolving well. "The fluidity of the engine meant that we had lovely parallax levels with a lot of visual variety for its time," Stuart says. As mentioned earlier, a lot of focus was being placed on the robot's head-mounted ball-bearing blaster. Rather than simply allow Tinhead to fire shots from the top of his head, it was decided that players could alter the trajectory of the bullets. "Tinhead had three key shots: horizontal, diagonal and

» [Mega Drive] The aim was to break Crystal Globes to release stars and find a large spinning Lucky Star to exit a sector. Without blowing up, of course.

» [Mega Drive] The easiest way to enjoy *Tinhead* today is to seek out the digital version on Steam or GOG, or look for the *Piko Interactive Collection 1* Evercade cartridge, which also includes 19 other games.

» [Mega Drive] Ancient worlds and ancient times. Stuart recalls uploading builds to bulletin boards via modem, blowing EPROM carts to test builds and having bug reports faxed to them.

» [Mega Drive] Stuart says the team wasn't going to better *Sonic* on sheer speed but the head-shooting mechanic made up for it. It allowed Tinhead to kill enemies from a distance. No need to bounce on their heads.

bouncing. The Mega Drive controller didn't have enough buttons to put all three shots on different controls so you had to cycle through them," Stuart explains. Horizontal and diagonal shots were the easiest to implement but, as Stuart says, "Bouncing required a bit more effort because the bullets bounced around the environment."

Nick's approach was outstanding, Richard adds. "In that generation of consoles, you didn't have the programming power to simulate physics in real-time, so the bouncing shots were 'table-driven' – they used a look-up table to determine their motion. That was the hardest part to implement. The maths for the horizontal and diagonal shots was relatively straightforward but it was Nick's tremendous talent and patience that made it possible for him to carefully code those tables so that the shots bounced in a very enjoyable, realistic way, bouncing a little less high each time."

The development team discovered that a good number of gamers found this triple-shot mechanic rather tricky to pull off but they went ahead with it regardless. "We knew, from our limited focus tests at the time, that people struggled with the triple-shot mechanic initially but found that, over time, they got used to it," Stuart says.

In fact, Richard puts any issues down to the level design rather than the mechanic. "I actually think that this is one of those times when players point to one thing as a problem, but the real issue is actually elsewhere," he says. "If the levels had more space to gather speed, and safer player-favouring level layout, then the game would have been a lot less cramped-feeling, the controls would have felt less twitchy, and the game would have been more fun, and more interesting to replay. We could then have done more work with the 'dance box' – the complex set of rules which determines how the camera view gets offset as the player-character moves left and right – and we could have ended up with sections that played like a side-scrolling shooter like *Scramble* or *Gradius*. So that's all on me, but you live and learn."

To make the game a tad easier to play, when Tinhead was hit he'd lose a battery rather than immediately forfeit one of his three lives. "The battery meter effectively acted as a shield mechanic protecting Tinhead from taking damage by depleting his batteries first before losing a life," says Stuart. The US version was also populated with more pick-ups. "It was typical at that time to make the US version easier," Stuart adds.

As it happened, this was the game that was released – *Tinhead* didn't hit shelves outside of America. The initial schedule date was missed too. The game was mastered in April 1994 and then ended up languishing for months. "Manufacturing cartridges was a costly and high-risk endeavour and our parent company, Spectrum HoloByte, was struggling," says Stuart. "This resulted in the game being released much later in the console generation with not a lot of support."

TINHEAD'S TUNES

LESS HEAVY METAL, MORE TECHNO-POP

Play *Tinhead* today and you'll still go away with one thing: a head pulsating with catchy earworm tunes. The work of videogame musician Paul Tonge, commissioning *Tinhead*'s soundtrack was almost an afterthought during the development process, "We were a fair bit into development before we starting thinking about sound," says the game's producer Stuart Whyte, but there's no doubt Paul did an amazing job.

» [Mega Drive] Although the music can be turned off, you simply wouldn't want to.

He had been approached after Alistair Brimble, David Whittaker, Tony Williams and MicroProse's own internal team turned the job down. "They were all too busy or unable to support the Mega Drive," Stuart says. Richard Lemarchand, the game's designer, recalls being nervous about working with Paul. "I'd never specced out music for a game before and Paul was already a legend in game music," he says.

Paul drew on the team's influences. "The MicroProse crew was going out dancing a lot during those times, to local clubs in Chippenham and West Country raves, and we loved everything that was spooling out from acid house and techno – from the Detroit sounds of The Belleville Three to the pop crossovers of Adamski, Opus III and Rozalla," Richard explains.

"I remember burbling to Paul about our influences in a fairly incoherent way and then, in an incredibly short amount of time later, he came back with all these perfect tunes. They had earworm pop melodies, but with house-techno baselines bumping along underneath."

Paul's sound effects also complemented the controls. "The improved sample rates of that generation of machines, and the inventive sounds that sound designers could coax out of them, usually with a really tiny memory footprint, made for a massive leap forward in game design, every bit as much as all those splendid graphics," Richard adds.

» [SNES] Although it started off life as a Mega Drive exclusive, *Tinhead* found its way onto the SNES in 2019.

It meant the game didn't sell very well by the time it ended up in the shops. "It kinda fizzled," Richard laments. "I didn't even realise that it had come out, until Stu told me about it, having seen it in a store! But over the years we saw people start to talk about it online, and it seems like it's become something of a cult classic! As someone who has always been more of an underground, indie culture person, and who believes that good work can eventually find its audience, that's actually incredibly satisfying." ✱

CLASSIC MOMENTS

It Came From The Desert

» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA » **RELEASED:** 1989 » **DEVELOPER:** CINEMAWARE

If you needed any idea of Cinemaware's ambition, you only had to examine its name. It's there as clear as day, 'cinema' and Cinemaware was one of the few developers of the time to use its games to capture the sheer scope and scale that a good movie could offer. From the dramatic dogfighting of *Wings* to punching out Nazis in *Rocket Ranger*, the games of Cinemaware felt larger than life and did a great job of translating movie tropes into digestible and entertaining game mechanics.

By far one of its biggest achievements was *It Came From The Desert*, a wonderful love letter to the iconic B-movies that dominated cinema throughout the Fifties. Before the game even begins you're treated to an eye-opening and instantly iconic title screen that not only sets the mood for the game perfectly but effortlessly conveys the title cards of the very movies it was emulating. Yes, we're giving two pages to a title screen, but what an iconic and memorable title screen it is.

BIO

Cinemaware originally released *It Came From The Desert* on Commodore's Amiga in 1989, where it received plenty of acclaim thanks to its charming story, excellent visuals and varied gameplay. The game's success meant it was eventually ported to the PC and TurboGrafx-CD, with the latter featuring live actors and many new characters. *Antheads: It Came From The Desert II*, an expansion/sequel, arrived in 1990.

MORE CLASSIC IT CAME FROM THE DESERT MOMENTS

Noooooooooo!

If one of the game's ants gets the better of you, you're treated to a dramatic scene of the beast's shadow looming over you. As its mandibles menacingly click away, your on-screen avatar lets out a final, blood-curdling scream.

It's Huge!

While the top-down view gives you a good indication of the size of the foes you're facing, they're even scarier from a first-person perspective. The gargantuan insects fill your view just as you begin to fill your pants.

Memorable Characters

Exploring the town of Lizard Breath is made all the more enjoyable because of the numerous townsfolk that live there. Some of them are everyday Joes, but a few, like this chap, are a little more bizarre and memorable.

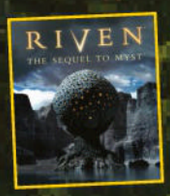
Hey, You Chicken!

One of the best minigames sees you playing chicken with a rival car. Simply put the pedal to the metal and hope that your opponent swerves before you do. Sadly, the Amiga can't render the horror on their faces when you have a near miss.

RIVEN

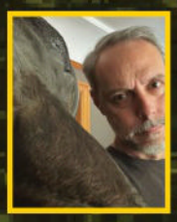
THE BEST-SELLING GAME OF 1997 WAS A CEREBRAL SLOW-BURNER SET ACROSS FIVE CDS. ITS PICTURESQUE SCENES AND CRYPTIC PUZZLES HAVE NOW BEEN REMADE IN FULLY EXPLORABLE 3D. GAME DIRECTOR RICHARD VANDER WENDE HELPS US UNRAVEL THE MYSTERIES OF RIVEN, THE SEQUEL TO MYST

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** BRØDERBUND
- **DEVELOPER:** CYAN
- **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE ADVENTURE



RICHARD VANDER WENDE

Richard is a visual designer who co-directed *Riven* and led its art direction, after working on films including *Aladdin* and *Willow*.

Just as the universe of *Riven* moves in mysterious ways, the stars aligned on the day Richard Vander Wende became a director for the game. Or as he puts it to us, "It was a total, serendipitous fluke. But it's a testament to the power of pursuing your passions and curiosities, no matter how unpromising the path ahead might seem."

Having worked at Disney, where he created artwork for the film *Aladdin*, Richard found himself between jobs with "no clue" where to turn his attention next. But then a friend gifted him a ticket to the Digital World Expo computer show in Los Angeles. There he happened to spot Robyn Miller, the man responsible – along with his brother Rand and their studio Cyan – for the 1993 puzzle adventure *Myst*. "I told him how great I thought *Myst* was – which had only been out for about nine months," Richard remembers. "He then asked me what I did, and I told him I'd been the production designer on *Aladdin*. He seemed sceptical; so when I got home, I grabbed my portfolio and drove back down to the Convention Centre. When I showed him my work, he got excited. He immediately pulled Rand in, who invited me to join them for lunch. After an amazing three-and-a-half hour meal at the top of the Bonaventure Hotel they asked me if I'd like to be a part of the sequel effort."

Myst had been an unparalleled commercial success for Cyan and its publisher Brøderbund. Nonetheless, Richard was clear from the start of the project that the sequel needed to forge its own path. "On my very first day at Cyan, I saw an early prototype model," he says. "It was a formal garden area, with a reflecting pool, and it looked just like something from *Myst*. I immediately questioned that – partially for my own edification, but also because this seemed like an opportunity to do something different. From my point of view, the entire world and everything in it, was the result of narrative events that we needed to get a handle on before we could intelligently proceed with designing and building anything."

> **"WE FLEW TO SANTA FE AND SPENT THREE DAYS GATHERING PHOTOS OF THE AREA"**
> **RICHARD VANDER WENDE**

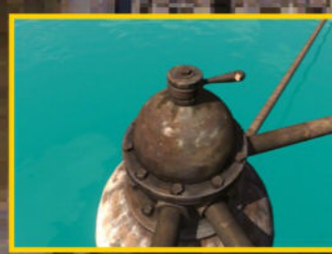
In keeping with that philosophy, the developers took time out early in creation of *Riven* to write a story treatment for the first *Myst* novel, *The Book Of Atrus*. Richard says doing this "greatly expanded our understanding" of the backstory before the team got far into development. "As we saw it, everything stemmed from – and should be a manifestation of – the story. That was the backbone that we knit everything out from," he explains. In *Riven*, that story begins with Atrus, a key character from *Myst* acted by Rand Miller, monologuing to the camera in a full-motion video sequence. Atrus possesses the ancient ability to craft linking books – magical tomes that act as portals between ages. In this

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MYST (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1993

URU
PLATFORM: PC
RELEASED: 2003

OBDUCTION
PLATFORM: PC, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2016



RIVEN

introduction, he compels you to travel through a book into the Age Of Riven, where your mission is to rescue his wife Catherine from his tyrannical father Ghen.

Alongside the underlying narrative, which is partly told through texts found on your travels, much of the worldbuilding in *Riven* comes from the captivating setting. The five islands of the game include natural landscapes and ancient tribal elements, alongside aspects inspired by industrial design and steam-age machinery. Some of these art styles and themes stemmed from a pivotal road trip the team undertook. "I saw a kinship between the basic structure of *Riven*'s story and indigenous areas of the American Southwest I'd seen. So we flew to Santa Fe and spent three days gathering photos of the area," Richard recollects. "This gave us a real-world analogy that became the foundational underpinning of *Riven*. And because those references all came from the same place, they harmonised with each other in a way that added a degree of veracity to the fiction we were crafting."

The Santa Fe influence is indeed clear to see as you explore the adobe architecture of *Riven* and its sun-soaked vistas. Added to that, the steam-age parts of the game stemmed from considerations about what

» [PC] A bridge leads to the mysterious golden dome on Temple Island.

» [PC] Key character Atrus is acted by Cyan cofounder Rand Miller.

» [PC] Jungle Island is a riveting location, with lots of open exploration to enjoy.

CONVERTING RIVEN

HOW DO THE CONSOLE AND MOBILE VERSIONS COMPARE?

» [PlayStation] Brighter scenes shine, but darker ones do look a bit muddy on Sony's console.

» [Saturn] The Saturn game does a good job of capturing the PC and Mac experience.

■ The impressive sights and sounds of *Riven* arrived on the Sony PlayStation and the Sega Saturn just a few months after the initial PC and Mac launch. Japanese studio Sunsoft developed both console versions. In Europe, Sega published the Saturn game and Acclaim published the PlayStation release, while in Japan, Enix published both conversions.

A magazine advert for the PlayStation conversion proudly promoted the size of the game with the strapline of "5 discs deep. A universe wide". This was accompanied by imagery showing off the rather chunky jewel case. Sunsoft managed to whittle the disc count down to four for the Saturn version, for which they also achieved brighter graphics. Both versions are solid enough, but they do suffer slightly longer load times than many PC and Mac owners would have enjoyed. Controlling the game naturally also feels more clunky on a gamepad than on a mouse.

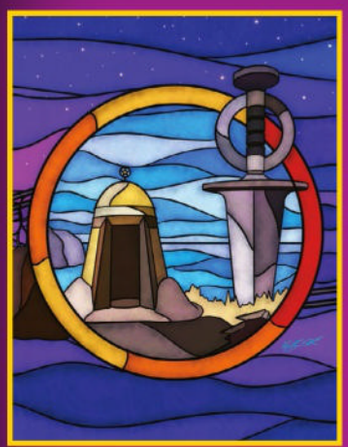
As for comparing the PC and Mac releases? Unlike *Myst*, which some fans maintain was superior on the Mac platform it was first designed for, *Riven* seems more or less identical on both. Years later, the game was released for iPhone in 2010. Spotting subtle details on a small phone screen can be tricky, so the 2013 iPad version offered an improved on-the-go experience.

» [PC] A psychedelic mine-cart ride connects two islands.

» [PC] Solving puzzles often requires close observation of tiny details.

EXPLORING RIVEN

A ROUGH GUIDE TO TRAVERSING RIVEN'S FIVE ISLANDS

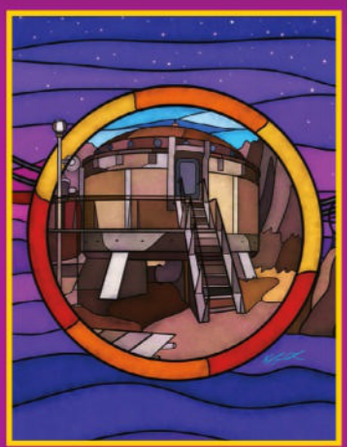


TEMPLE ISLAND

■ Your adventure starts on Temple Island, dominated by an impressive golden dome. An early puzzle sees you navigate a rotating room. Across a bridge, you'll find an eerie temple leading to a Maglev – the mechanised, tram-like transport system between islands.

JUNGLE ISLAND

■ This is the largest island and the most interesting to explore, Jungle Island is inhabited by reclusive Rivenese natives. In their village you'll encounter an underwater submarine-like system and a secret passageway to a rebel retreat.

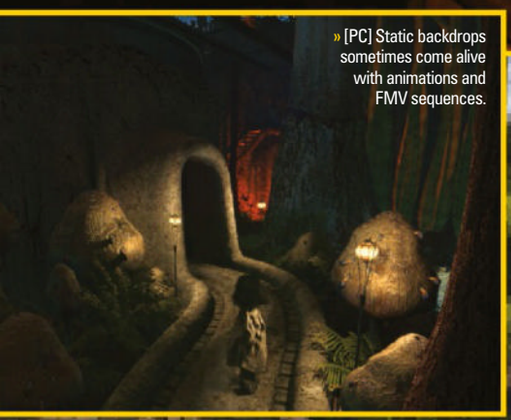


BOILER ISLAND

■ An azure lake greets you when you arrive on Boiler Island, which is also known as Book Assembly Island. Trace the pipes and study the mechanics of a big boiler to progress to an upper level, where Ghen's laboratory awaits.

PRISON ISLAND

■ Built on the foundations of an enormous tree felled by Ghen to create books, this is now where he keeps prisoners. Here you'll find Catherine, the wife of Atrus who transported you to Riven to find her and capture Ghen.



» [PC] Static backdrops sometimes come alive with animations and FMV sequences.

SURVEY ISLAND

Used by Ghen to study the drift of Riven's islands as they deteriorate, Survey Island has hidden depths. Find your way below the surface and you'll access Ghen's underwater complex, including a throne connected to a variety of viewing devices.

Ghen, the character at the centre of the story, would have realistically been able to build. "He'd been trapped on the islands for decades, with limited resources, which definitely would have put a cap on what he was able to achieve. The Industrial Revolution seemed a potentially fruitful analogue to that, so we tried to keep his constructions at that general level," Richard reasons, before adding that there was also a playability consideration here. "Tech from that era was generally friendlier, easier to understand; and since a large part of *Riven* involves figuring out how things work, the more accessible we could make them, the more enjoyable that process would be."

If the strange puzzles and mysterious atmosphere of *Riven* feel like the work of developers chasing an independent creative vision, that probably has something to do with the small size of the team. Compared to his previous role at Disney, Richard found working at Cyan to be liberating. "It was such a joy," he stresses. "The vastly smaller crew on *Riven* meant that we had infinitely more control over the work and, as a consequence, the end result was far closer to what I'd intended than anything else I'd ever worked on. As a designer, working in large-scale collaborative media like films and games, that's what you always hope for but rarely get. Large studios like Disney are factories by comparison, so getting them to stretch beyond their comfort zone is much more difficult."

While the team may have been modest in size, the expectations placed on them were vast. When the release of *Riven* was delayed from the Christmas season in 1996, Bloomberg reported that "Brøderbund's stock took a major hit" as a result. "Expectations are so high, it's scary," the news outlet reported Rand Miller as saying. Brøderbund had a great deal riding on the title and invested in a multi-million dollar advertising campaign that surrounded the eventual 31 October 1997 release. To the relief of everyone involved in the four-year development, the launch proved wildly successful. Despite arriving with around two months of 1997 left, *Riven* ended up selling more copies than any other game that whole year. By one year after release, it had sold more than one-and-a-half million copies.

"THE END RESULT WAS CLOSER TO WHAT I'D INTENDED THAN ANYTHING ELSE I'D EVER WORKED ON"
RICHARD VANDER WENDE

» [PC] These dinosaur-like creatures flee as we arrive on the Instagram-worthy beach.

As with *Myst* before it, stunning graphics were a huge selling point for *Riven*. *Edge* commented that, "*Riven* has an aesthetic completeness quite unlike any game *Edge* has previously encountered," while adding that the puzzles mean, "It's more than beauty for its own sake." Like some other commentators, though, *Edge* highlighted the relative lack of full 3D interactivity that PC gamers were starting to expect from first-person games. A reviewer for *Salon* remarked that, "*Riven*'s gameplay has a graceful elegance that reminds me of a masterfully constructed novel," while the usually irreverent and sceptical *PC Zone* begrudgingly confessed that, "*Riven* is a nice collection of breathtakingly well-drawn visuals with some interesting moments that do (providing you're of an open mind) sort of captivate you."

In the following years, *Riven* was followed by four sequels. *Myst III: Exile* maintained frame-by-frame graphics but introduced the ability to take a 360-degree look around every scene. *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst* experimented with real-time graphics and third-person perspective, and then *Myst IV: Revelation* returned to pre-rendered, static views. *Myst V: End Of Ages* brought more visual freedom with multiple camera angles. Then there was *Uru Live*, which moved the series into massively online multiplayer territory and has since gone through various iterations, the latest of which is still available to play for free. Cyan (by this time trading as Cyan Worlds) also created updated versions of *Myst*, including *RealMyst*, which remade the classic game with a fully moveable environment. Throughout all of these releases you can trace a push towards greater freedom and immersion. That led fans to hope that *Riven* would be given the same treatment. One group of modders and enthusiasts even took it on themselves to start trying to achieve that goal in an unofficial capacity under the banner of *The Starry Expanse Project*.

» [PC] Various mechanised transportation systems help you traverse the islands of Riven.

» [PC] An almost postcard-perfect vista, if it weren't for those industrial contraptions.

On the 25th anniversary of *Riven* in 2022, a big announcement came. Alongside unveiling a modestly updated version of the original game for modern platforms, Cyan Worlds had more significant news. Working in partnership with The Starry Expanse Project team, it was developing a complete remake of *Riven* in full 3D and virtual reality. Very sadly, the start of this project had coincided with a tragic time for Richard. "In April of 2020, after a long and valiant struggle with cancer, my wife Kate died. We'd been together for 36 years. There's no word for what that did to me," Richard tells us. "Her death also happened to coincide with the onset of the pandemic, so the fear and isolation that added to the equation didn't help. At some point in the course of all that, a Quest 2 headset mysteriously appeared on my doorstep. Then Rand reached out to let me know that Cyan Worlds was going to remake *Riven*, and asked if I had any interest in being involved."

Richard admits that his first instinct was to say no. "Had our cancer ordeal not wiped me out financially as well as emotionally, I probably would've declined. I had no desire to paint the same painting twice. And the aim of copying the original game just felt like a mistake – copies being rarely, if ever, as good as the originals. And – I was still a twisted grieving wreck of a human being. But Rand was persuasive, so despite my trepidations I agreed to an initial, two month consultancy. Once I re-familiarised myself with that world, however, my brain wouldn't stop. This was clearly an opportunity – to strengthen and expand upon what we'd created two-and-a-half decades earlier. But it would necessitate being open to deviating from the canonical orthodoxies of the original."

Robert Kreps, a key member of The Starry Expanse Project team, was involved from the start of the *Riven* remake. Richard says Robert became the "chief archaeologist" of the team when it came to analysing and reconstructing lost 3D assets from the original game. "That freed Rand and I up to focus on rethinking things. We had been granted three extra years to fix, refine and expand our original effort. So we just started by questioning everything. And each time we dove back into the foundational narrative and managed to excavate some hitherto unknown aspect of the world, we would come away feeling energised." Richard says it was motivating to think that "fans would get to play *Riven* again for the first time – and that was a very exciting notion".

> **"THIS WAS CLEARLY AN OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND UPON WHAT WE'D CREATED"**
> **RICHARD VANDER WENDE**

The remake of *Riven* was released in April 2024 to critical acclaim. *The Guardian* scored it four out of five, while *PC Gamer* awarded it 90%. The remake retains the core elements of the original, but with reworked puzzles and unbroken 3D exploration. Even cutscenes have been animated into the traversable environment. Has it been gratifying for Richard to see praise for the new version? "When I left Cyan after the original *Riven*, I was effectively cut off from most of the feedback, so I never really knew whether what we had done had meant anything to anyone," he reflects. "It wasn't like I could go to a movie theatre and sit with the audience; and social media simply didn't exist yet. Over the years, I'd get the odd email from someone via my website, but that was it. So it's been deeply gratifying, this time, to be able to get a real sense of what fans and critics are making of this new version. It's only about 80% of what I'd hoped it might be, but I think we still managed to give people something special."

Over a quarter of a century after the original release, there are now various ways to play *Riven* on different platforms, be it the original version or the modern remake. It may not be for everyone, and the brain-bending puzzles have no doubt led to many confused looks and abandoned playthroughs. But as the demand for a remake attests, there are also plenty of fans who feel very strongly that it offers a special experience. Richard is keen to credit the rest of the team that made that happen. "My sincerest thanks to the teams of both productions – and to Rand, for the chance to bring the world of *Riven* into sharper focus." ✱

» [PC] The remake introduces new puzzles and areas while retaining the core of the classic game.

» [PC] Even if you completed the original, there are fresh challenges worked into the remake.

VIRTUAL RIVEN

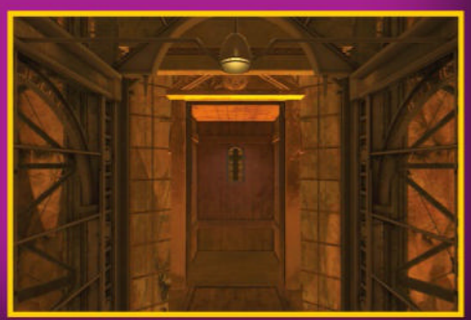
HOW VR ADDS EXTRA ATMOSPHERE TO THE REMAKE

Immersion in a strange universe has always been part of the appeal of *Riven*. When Cyan Worlds set out to remake the game, bringing its islands to life in virtual reality as well as on flat screens was part of the plan from the start. The virtual reality experience is available on the Meta Quest 2 and 3 headsets. You can also play this version on PC, provided you have a very high-spec PC with a VR setup. If you do, you're in for some amazing scenes.

Both PC VR and Quest versions look striking and have been well received. However, some reviewers have noted that some graphical compromises were necessary for the experience to be possible for the Quest. The Quest version also includes a few extra loading screens that could break the sense of immersion slightly, including before and after you use the Maglev tram to travel between islands.

While the remake has evened out the difficulty level of some of the tougher puzzles in the original game, there are still lots of challenges for which scribbling down notes about the world (such as symbols you discover in a book) can be a huge help. That's difficult to do with a VR headset on your head, although you can still take screenshots and refer back to them in the 'notebook' area of the menu. Road To VR suggests in their review that a "spatial pencil" to annotate found letters would have been slightly more ideal.

Nonetheless, the chance to explore the scenic world of *Riven* in immersive VR is an exciting one that feels like a natural fit. A review in *The Gamer* argues that the game is "what virtual reality is made for" adding that *Riven* is ultimately "a tactile experience designed for moving around and using your hands".



» [Meta Quest 3] VR promises to make the otherworldly setting even more immersive.

» [PC] Having complete freedom to move and look around makes all the difference in the remake.

Peripheral Vision

ESSENTIAL GAME
SILENT SCOPE COMPLETE

The third and final Xbox lightgun game is the one that gives you by far the most to do with your gun, offering four games from Konami's sniping series – as well as the first three arcade instalments, you get *Silent Scope 3* which was originally designed for the PS2. While all of the games here were released on the PS2, you may be surprised to learn that none of them had lightgun support of any kind, making the Xbox versions easily the best ones available on home consoles.

Sharp Shooter

» **PLATFORM:** Xbox » **YEAR:** 2003 » **COST:** £24.99 (launch), £40+ (today, boxed), £15+ (today, unboxed)

As a prolific manufacturer of third-party console accessories, Joytech had made a lightgun or two prior to its foray into the Xbox gun scene, and the Sharp Shooter brand had previously been established for guns on other platforms. The branding wasn't the only thing that was recycled, though – the body of the gun itself is exceptionally similar to the PlayStation and PS2-compatible Sharp Shooter of the era, from the handgun shape to the red-dot sight that can be attached.

The Sharp Shooter was a rather curious item upon its release. *XBM* noted that "the accuracy of the gun is top-notch" despite "feeling slightly cheap" but the bigger problem was the lack of software support. Just two games, *The House Of The Dead 3* and *Starsky & Hutch*, were available at the time of release and only one more followed afterwards. This lack of software likely goes some way to explaining why the peripheral isn't tremendously common. If you're picking one up today, like most lightguns you'll need a CRT television in order for it to work correctly. *

Sharp Shooter fact

■ The Sharp Shooter was released in both a regular cardboard box and a plastic blister pack, meaning examples with the original packaging can be tricky to find today.

THE MAKING OF PROJECT EDEN

BY THE TIME TOMB RAIDER II CAME OUT IN 1997, CORE DESIGN WAS WONDERING WHAT TO DO NEXT – EVENTUALLY THIS LED THE SERIES INTO A NEW DIRECTION, AS WELL AS THE BIRTH OF A COMPLETELY ORIGINAL GAME THAT'S MOSTLY BEEN FORGOTTEN TO TIME... UNTIL NOW

WORDS BY DARYL BAXTER

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** EIDOS
- **DEVELOPER:** CORE DESIGN
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2, PC
- **RELEASED:** 2001
- **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

By late 1997, Britpop was fading, Oasis had released their disappointing third album, *Be Here Now*, but Core Design, based in Derby, England, was thriving thanks to the first two *Tomb Raider* games. With *Tomb Raider II* dominating the gaming charts, the team was unsure what to do next.

"I assumed we would continue making *Tomb Raider* games, especially given how successful it had been," explains Gavin Rummery, lead programmer at Core. "We were supposed to be making *Tomb Raider III* on a brand-new engine. But because we wanted two years to do it, Eidos insisted that another team was tasked with making additional levels for *Tomb Raider II* – but as a full game, which was dubbed *Tomb Raider II.5* internally."

> "WE WERE ORIGINALLY SUPPOSED TO BE MAKING TOMB RAIDER III ON A BRAND-NEW ENGINE"
> GAVIN RUMMERY

The team were meant to be developing *Tomb Raider III* as a launch title for the Sony PlayStation 2. Instead, another team, who were making *Tomb Raider II.5*, were told that this would be *Tomb Raider III*, which subsequently came out in November 1998.

The original team felt creatively drained, having had the third entry taken away, and were now put to work on another game in the series. "Our team suddenly found ourselves making *Tomb Raider IV* – as a sequel to another team's game over which we had no creative control," Gavin reveals. "This took the wind out of our sails and made us realise that our creative energies for doing another *Tomb Raider* just wasn't really there; we were burnt out from the intense schedule of *Tomb Raider II*." In a way, this led to a blessing in disguise for the team, with Eidos offering them the chance to stay at Core and work on a completely new game, which they accepted, meaning most of the team would not work on a *Tomb Raider* game again.

Lead animator, Stuart Atkinson, recalls coming across *Project Eden* in the early days. "I remember Gav talking about *Hired Guns*, the four-player game on the Amiga and other turn-based multi-character games. We talked about how we would translate that style of game into a full 3D world."

Gavin originally created a design document called *Downtime*, which eventually turned into *Project Eden*. "Growing up reading *Judge Dredd*, I was fascinated by the idea of Mega-City One and how it might be in reality. It occurred to me that in these cities, the most desirable areas would be at the top, and that the lower levels would be the oldest and most decayed and abandoned, so the idea of the city in *Project Eden* was born. The concept had players starting the game from the top, and then go deeper and deeper into the depths," Gavin explains. "The original concept was for the team to be varied in size – as an entire squad – and the experience would be like the

» [PlayStation 2] The first moment you're shown *Project Eden*'s HUD – you'll be seeing a lot of it throughout the game.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RICK DANGEROUS
PLATFORM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1989

CHUCK ROCK
PLATFORM: ATARI ST, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1991

TOMB RAIDER (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: SATURN, PLAYSTATION, PC
RELEASED: 1996

» [PlayStation 2] The very first introduction to the team you'll be controlling throughout the game – consisting of Carter, Mink, Andre and Amber.

control room in *Aliens* with players needing to deploy their squad members to seal doors and set up defences behind them as they delved deeper. That isn't really how the game turned out, because it was heavily influenced by the puzzle level designs of Heather and Neal."

***Project Eden* had the innovative feature of being able to control four characters at once – something that *Grand Theft Auto V* would similarly use with its three-character-switching system in 2013.** "*Hired Guns* was a personal favourite of mine from the Amiga days that was a much more direct inspiration. You had four characters that you controlled separately, and it was a cyberpunk world much like *Project Eden* where you went on missions and switched between the characters to complete them," Gavin says. "I loved that game and thought it would be great to make something similar with a modern full 3D game engine."

» [PlayStation 2] You'll likely not expect a monster like this to suddenly appear, but as you reach the halfway point of *Project Eden*, they become a common occurrence.

» [PlayStation2] *Project Eden* looks overwhelming to start with. Luckily, the cursor makes navigating the game relatively easy.

» [PlayStation 2] Make the most of that orange sky, as you won't see much of it once you finish the first level.

Animator, Peter Barnard, who was responsible for most of the FMV (full-motion video) on the first four *Tomb Raider* games, was tasked to help make the cutscenes on *Project Eden*. "I do remember the early work on what was going to become *Tomb Raider Next Gen* on the PS2 – which then became the foundation for *Project Eden* after Eidos wanted a *Tomb Raider* game every year on PlayStation. A lot of characters walking about and looking at each other, swapping player control between characters – the main foundation of the game."

Moving to a whole new console, as well as a new series, was a breath of fresh air for the original *Tomb Raider* team. "The early months were great fun. The team was energised by being free from *Tomb Raider*, especially for those who had done *Tomb Raider I* and *II*," Stuart recalls. "When we first got a level up and running with the new engine it looked so good that people from outside our team would come and check it out and be blown away. At that stage we were all very happy with how

GAVIN RUMMERY

Gavin created the script and the engine for the game. He now heads up Collective Anvil, a blockchain gaming company.

PETER BARNARD

Peter was responsible for all of the cutscenes and full-motion videos, and is currently a freelancer in the industry.

STUART ATKINSON

Stuart created and animated all characters, enemies and machines in *Project Eden*, and is now an indie game developer.

JOBY WOOD

Joby helped to make *Eden*'s multiplayer mode and now leads his own studio creating a VR sports game called *BoW II VR*.

EDEN ARENA

THE TEAM REVISIT PROJECT EDEN'S UNDERRATED MULTIPLAYER MODE

Another aspect of *Project Eden* that stands out is its Arena multiplayer mode. There are three modes to choose from: the first is Deathmatch, where you and a friend can control one of the four characters to win a bunch of matches, Team Mode lets you and a friend solve puzzles in a few maps, and Racing Mode enables you to control one of the Rovers through an obstacle course, avoiding traps and falling debris.

Joby Wood, level designer on *Tomb Raider IV* and *V*, was brought in to help with the Rover racing map. "Gavin asked me to create a map for *Eden* by using existing assets. The new system they had developed for *Project Eden* was really great," Joby recalls. Peter Barnard also remembers making a few maps for Arena. "The new release date meant I had time spare, so I created three maps – I had so much fun playing these – one called Hanger had a lot of environmental pieces that would affect you!" These modes remain a lot of fun to play all these years later. If you've got a PS2 lying around, grab some friends and show them just how good *Project Eden*'s multiplayer still is.

» [PlayStation 2] It's not exactly *Mario Kart 64*, but it's a nice break from the main game.

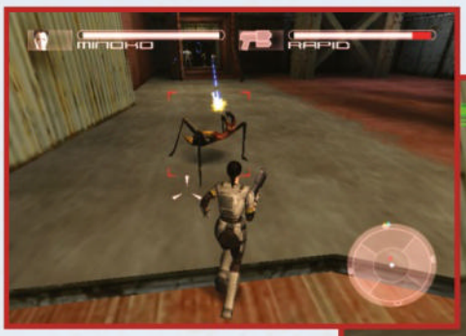
» [PlayStation 2] Once you play these maps you'll instantly want to go back and try and beat your high score. It becomes quite entertaining.

it was looking – we just had no idea the long grind ahead of us to finish it."

Project Eden introduced innovative controls for its time, especially the use of dual-stick controls in third-person games. "It was still early days for 3D control schemes," Gavin explains. "*Eden*'s controls were so new that many players found them confusing, but they've aged better than the original *Tomb Raider* games!" Another unique feature was the ability to use the camera with a cursor, inspired by FPS games on PCs, allowing precise aim without shifting the entire view. "I was proud of that – I thought it worked well, but it never caught on," says Gavin. One inspiration the team took from *Tomb Raider*, was to not have jumping as a separate button. "The main way we switched from *Tomb Raider*'s controls was the early decision to not include jumping as an action – that came from the fact we'd all found the jumping sections in *Half-Life* infuriating, so didn't think it worked for a game that could be played in first-person."

Development of *Project Eden* ended up taking four years. "It lasted from 1998 to 2001 – way longer than the two years we intended. This was part of the general problem at Core of insufficient project planning that of course led to *Tomb Raider*: *Angel Of Darkness* massively overrunning and all the problems that caused," says Gavin.

As the game was wrapping up, *Project Eden*'s release date had the unfortunate timing of being released days after *Grand Theft Auto III* – but this was due to a request from one of Core's bosses. "The original date was moved back to accommodate new voice acting, as Jeremy Heath-Smith (co-head of Core Design at the time) didn't like them," Peter reveals. "He called myself and Andrew



» [PlayStation 2] In the later stages of the game, you'll come across way more mutants that veer into *Resident Evil* territory.

» [PlayStation 2] You'll find yourself in these situations a lot – which always calls for switching to another character to rescue your team member and be rid of the enemy.

» [PlayStation 2] By pressing L3 on the DualShock 2 controller, you can play the game as a first-person shooter. But you may encounter some strange bugs and clipping, especially when you get damaged.

A NOT-SO EDEN ENDING

GAVIN AND PETER RECALL WORKING ON, THAT ENDING

After Vicky Arnold, the first female writer for Lara Croft, had left, Gavin Rummery was left to write the game's script. "One day we were told to arrange voice recordings – but at that point we had no script! I assumed we'd get the services of Vicky, but that wasn't to be, so I wrote all the story and dialogue over two weeks as best as I could!" Gavin reveals. "Originally the main enemy was meant to be Dr Molenski, but I switched it to being his daughter, then the idea that she was related to one of your party members and that was the reason they were being lured into the depths. It was the best I could come up with and it's the only script I've ever written in my career! The ending… mixed reactions there!" Indeed, Peter Barnard remembers the last scene of the game to be anticlimactic. "The end sequence is one I forgot about – which happened right at the end of the project. I just watched it again and it was mental. I was in charge of making it work to be cohesive and cost effective. What I couldn't change was the background, so they walk off towards… a wall."

» [PlayStation 2] A bizarre farewell, as both are about to walk into a wall, instead of a sunset.

» [PlayStation 2] Even for PS2, you can almost tell Mink's bewilderment here from her almost-hesitant wave and blank facial expression.

» [PlayStation 2] It's moments like these when *Eden* gets its groove on – switching between your team to defeat the enemies can be exhilarating.

» [PlayStation 2] Controlling the bulky cyborg has its moments, allowing you to easily fend off enemies and withstand environmental hazards like electricity and poisonous gas.

» [PlayStation 2] Using the different weapons all have different blasts and effects, making every shot a satisfying one.

» [PlayStation] This may remind you of another game, *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* by Oddworld Inhabitants, but you won't get an "OK!" response here.

» [PlayStation 2] This is the first moment you're in control of the Fab Four – we recommend getting used to the controls and the HUD as soon as you can.

Thompson into his office and said, '*Eden*'s voices are shit – sort it out!' This did allow more dev time which the game benefitted from."

Sadly, you were lucky if you saw adverts for *Project Eden* on release – a far cry from *Tomb Raider*. "The marketing of the game was terrible, but Eidos seemed to be squandering a lot of innovative titles from its studios at the time in favour of putting all their efforts behind their guaranteed hits," Gavin says. "*Project Eden* was marketed as an FPS instead of a puzzle-oriented action adventure. They didn't even mention it was made by the original *Tomb Raider* team or try to market it towards people who like *Tomb Raider*, so it sank without a trace: going up against titles like *GTA* was just part of the general ineptitude of the marketing effort." Peter agrees, with *Project Eden* being up against other games around this time. "*Max Payne* came out, as did *Red Faction* and *Gran Turismo*, all of which flooded the market – I do think we missed our window – nowadays we'd be able to patch the game more easily."

Yet for all of the issues, *Project Eden* is a unique game that shows off what a *Tomb Raider III* for PlayStation 2 could have been. Nevertheless, Gavin, Stuart and Peter still hold a lot of fondness for developing the game. "The game was full of a great bunch of passionate people to work with – we were really blazing trails at the time – all very exciting," Peter says.

> "I ALWAYS FELT WE PUT EVERYTHING AND THE KITCHEN SINK INTO THAT GAME, WHICH WAS NO DOUBT WHY IT TOOK US SO LONG TO DEVELOP!"
> **GAVIN RUMMERY**

"I liked the immediacy that the game could be tweaked and the creators got rapid feedback in the engine – very quick iteration on level design and enemy setup. The game itself required you to think – some fun puzzles and a need to swap teammates, time to explore and look around the world."

Gavin agrees, with *Project Eden* showcasing a lot of innovations still used today. "We did a lot of things that were ahead of their time – I always felt we put everything and the kitchen sink into that game, which was no doubt why it took us so long to develop! The ability to play first or third-person and switch between the two is not common to this day, and meant we had one of the first FPS games where you could see your character's body when you looked down."

Almost 24 years on since its release, *Project Eden* has become an underrated classic. "Overall, the concept of controlling a team of characters, being able to play the exact same game alone or with friends, is something that hasn't been done much even to this day," Gavin reflects. "In the end, I'm proud of the game as we were trying to innovate. Reviews are mixed – some love it, others hate it – but mostly people haven't heard of it as it never made much impact, which is a bit sad after all the work we put into it!" ✱

CLEAR POINT
10000pt
1
ROLL-TO
BETT

BursTrick Wake Boarding!!

TIME TO WAKE UP

» RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION » 2000 » METRO CORPORATION

The late-Nineties and early Noughties were really the golden years of the extreme sports genre, a time when publishers were willing to make games based on everything from scooters to sky surfing. The odd one that seemed to capture my imagination was wakeboarding, because *BursTrick* always stood out to me when I saw it in magazines, since it had the kind of colourful arcade aesthetic that I love, and which was falling out of fashion at the time. I never managed to pick it up back then, but I liked the idea of it enough that when I finally did find a copy in 2014, I decided to grab it.

For those unfamiliar with wakeboarding, it involves someone holding onto a long rope handle that trails behind a speedboat, and trying to jump off of its wake. In Trick Mode, you'll do exactly that, but the truth is that it's not tremendously exciting since you don't have an awful lot of freedom. No, the real fun is found in Obstacle Mode, in which you speed around courses trying to pick up points by jumping off of ramps and collecting rings – the smaller the ramp, the more points you'll get. In this mode you have some control over the speed of the boat, and there are obstacles like falling rocks and careless Jet-Ski riders to dodge.

BursTrick isn't going to tear you away from the *Tony Hawk* or *Cool Boarders* games for too long, mostly because it's a bit limited in scope and it doesn't have a multiplayer mode to extend your interest. Anyone who wants a more robust wakeboarding game should probably look beyond the original PlayStation and try *Wakeboarding Unleashed Featuring Shaun Murray.* Still, it's definitely diverting for a little while and if you fancy a trip back to the era of blue skies and gnarly tricks, you shouldn't have to pay too much for a used copy. ✱

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **» DEVELOPER:** KEELWORKS
- **» RELEASE:** 2024
- **» PLATFORM:** PC, PLAYSTATION 5, XBOX SERIES X|S
- **» GENRE:** ARCADE SHOOTER

CYGNI
ALL GUNS BLAZING

CYGNI: ALL GUNS BLAZING BROUGHT ITS PLAYERS A LEVEL OF POLISH RARELY SEEN IN THE SHOOTER GENRE – AND A VERY PARTICULAR INFLUENCE FROM THE PAST. BUT WHY DID A TEAM FROM OUTSIDE GAMES DECIDE TO BUCK THE TREND WHEN IT COMES TO MODERN SHMUP DESIGN?

WORDS BY WILL FREEMAN

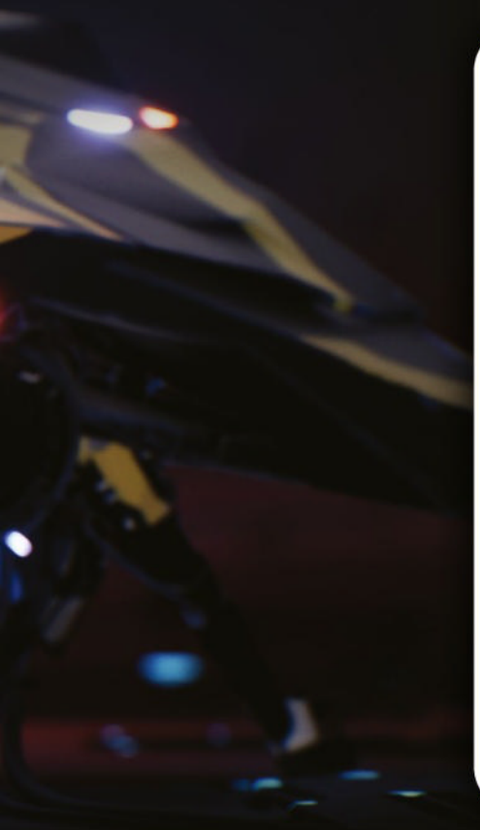
When a studio from the world of visual effects and film makes its debut in videogames, you might imagine it would flex its cinematic muscle working with a genre like action adventure, where there's an explicit opportunity to showcase skills around lighting and camera work and narrative drama. But looking back to gamings past? That seems a little more unlikely.

It turns out, however, that the Edinburgh-based KeelWorks saw things a little differently. Earlier this year the studio released its first game in the form of *CYGNI: All Guns Blazing*, a dazzlingly polished 2D shooter with a cinematic quality arguably never seen in the genre before. KeelWorks has a history making remarkably high-quality animated cinematics – and composing scores and other music for worlds like film and television. The founding team are also avid lifelong gamers, so it was perhaps inevitable that they might start applying their skill set to game design and development. But why make a shmup?

"There's plenty of room to innovate with this genre, in our opinion," offers Meher Kalenderian, KeelWorks founder and CEO, who also stands as a lasting fan of the genre, and producer on *CYGNI*. "Shmups, to me, have this recognisable, familiar structure to them that appeals to veterans, but also newcomers. What attracted us to the genre was the potential to modernise it; to modernise this familiar genre with stunning visuals and the immersive sound design and orchestral music and some fresh mechanics. So while we've tried to respect the genre's legacy as such, we also wanted to push its boundaries, giving players the nostalgia element, but also a forward-looking experience. Plus, we love sci-fi here – and

> "THERE'S PLENTY OF ROOM TO INNOVATE WITH THIS GENRE, IN OUR OPINION"
> MEHER KALENDERIAN

that's another reason." Shmups certainly offer a distinct means through which to explore game design innovation. They present a significantly constrained template, compared to many other gaming forms – particularly in their arcade manifestation, where a credit system, lives, diminutive hitboxes, a scrolling 2D playing field viewed from a single perspective, and often a five-level structure are all near untouchable constants. Of course, there are exceptions to that statement, but so often, the opportunity for innovation here is in the nuance contained within that firm genre template, where tweaks to scoring systems or the addition of a mechanic



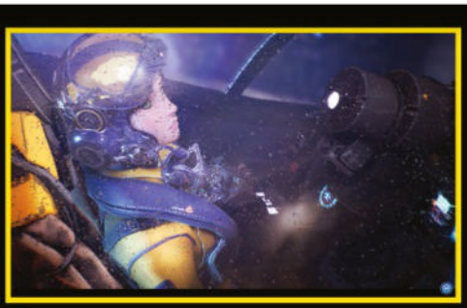
INSPIRING DESTRUCTION

The games (and movie) that inspired CYGNI

■ The *CYGNI* team name checks all manner of games and other sources when discussing *CYGNI*'s influences. Taito's 1994 arcade wonder *RayForce* might come as no surprise, as like *CYGNI* , it has depth of setting at its heart, with ground and air enemies. *Gradius* gets a shout-out too, thanks to its mesmerising atmosphere and on-the-fly ship upgrade system. The movie *Starship Troopers* held a great sway as well, providing an inspiration for the insectoid enemies and ferocious battles.

But – considering *CYGNI*'s extension of the Euroshmup tradition – the most distinct games that the KeelWorks team point to are two examples of that form; albeit ones from US developers. Eclipse Software initially released *Tyrian* as a shareware demo in 1995, before subsequent versions followed. To this day, it has a reputation as a cult hit, and the influence on *CYGNI* is clear, from the verti-zontal presentation to the equipment-buying system. Tyrian itself was an homage to Compile's iconic *Zanac*, which almost feels there in the *CYGNI* DNA too. A year earlier, *Raptor: Call Of The Shadows* had been unleashed by Cygnus Studios. It also brought verti-zontal presentation and a equipment-buying system – and at the time was considered stunning graphically and cinematically, even if it feels a little primitive by today's standards.

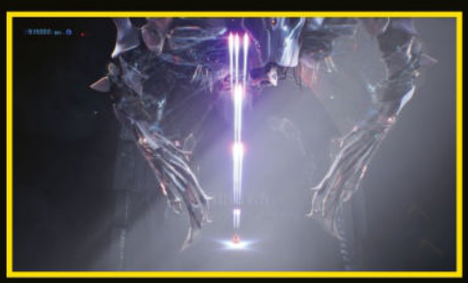
like encouraging point-blank shooting for bonuses can utterly disrupt or shift the play feel and flow of a release. And so it was that KeelWorks zeroed in on its chance to create something distinct, yet familiar, potentially reaching a vast, diverse audience. Because *CYGNI* is absolutely designed to be a shmup of wide appeal and mainstream success – not a curious release doomed to remain niche.



» [PC] KeelWorks legacy in the VFX world is evident in *CYGNI*'s wildly polished cutscenes.

» [PC] From the opening moment of *CYGNI*'s first stage, it is evidently a game brimming with detail.

***CYGNI* itself somewhat rejects the recent indie shmup renaissance's affection for adopting the design tenets of the genre's bullet hell, arcade anchored form born in Japan.** Instead, it feels very much like a 'Euroshmup'. When it first appeared, that term simply referred to shmups made by European studios. In time, though, it came to frame a particular style of 2D shooter, often with health bars, upgrade systems, more stages, longer levels, a greater focus on narrative, and less complex scoring. At this stage there have been Euroshmups made in the US and even Japan. Euroshmup is also sometimes used as a dismissive term by the hardcore arcade shooter community, who see it as a lesser form. And yet a great many iconic, brilliant shooters – like *Agony*, *Banshee*, *Apidya*, *Tyrian* and Jets 'N' Guns – are very much Euroshmups. Perhaps they aren't lesser than Japan's arcade shooters, but simply distinct? That's a proposition that might still brew murmuring discontent among some genre devotees. And yet there is no real reason a purebred Euroshmup can't offer something brilliant, entertaining, and valid. Which was KeelWorks' aim with its gaming debut.



» [PC] The influence of *Starship Troopers* is there in the grotesque, insectoid bosses.

With *CYGNI*, the stages are indeed longer. Additionally, there's seven in total, your ship can take plenty of hits, and your shield can be constantly topped up. There's an upgrade system, and there is very much an emphasis on plot and atmosphere. In fact, *CYGNI* serves up visual, lighting and animation effects that absolutely bring AAA levels of cinematic quality. From the particle effects to billowing explosions to moody, sinister lighting, it is an incredibly beautiful game. And it is generously seasoned with multiple cutscenes of striking quality. A two-weapon system, meanwhile, lets you attack both air and ground-based enemies – and the planetary surface below constantly brims with detail, as thousands of ground troops do battle while you plough overhead unleashing your firepower. Unlike most earlier shooters offering a chance to hassle air and ground targets, where a single 2D plane hosted every sprite, in the case of *CYGNI*, the game exists in a three-dimensional space, making everything all the more convincing and engrossing. Its world ▶

WHO FRAMED CYGNI?

The ambition of a deceptively small team

■ Glance at *CYGNI: All Guns Blazing*'s wildly impressive visuals, and you'd be forgiven for thinking it is the work of a vast team, backed by a substantial budget. KeelWorks may well one day be that kind of studio, but when it started on *CYGNI* it had a headcount of three. More staff and contractors joined through the development, but the outfit remained modest in scale. Which makes the team's technical achievement with *CYGNI* all the more stunning.

"*CYGNI*'s element of depth and polish was a tremendous challenge" Nareg confirms. "When we talk about this game, there's a lot of misconception out there that it was a AAA budgeted super high-end creation, and that's not quite true. I always bring back the example of Jessica Rabbit, from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. She says, "I'm not bad; I'm just drawn that way." She's famously sexy, you know, but she's just drawn that way. Well, we don't have the budget; *CYGNI*'s just drawn that way. We never had the luxury of budget or time, and in comparison [with true AAA] it is an indie project. So we did everything we did within the time and scope available."

The results, then, are all the more impressive. Because *CYGNI* still feels like the work of a vast team.

» [PC] While *CYGNI* isn't an arena shooter, sometimes it sure feels like one.

truly is a place that feels like it is suffering a very real and destructive conflict.

An on-the-fly upgrade system also lets you move power cell-like units between your shields and weapons, letting you dynamically adjust the two against one another – something that does feel more informed by arcade shooters, where managing systems while dodging and shooting is a mainstay. Yet the result is a game where you can be a relative bullet sponge, soaking up shots; something very different from the feeling of playing a bullet hell shmup, where your fragile craft disintegrates at the mere touch of a single piece of enemy ordinance. It's a lot of fun, and that distinctness may well be a result of the strengths of coming to game making from another industry entirely.

"Our background lets us look at videogames from a different point of view," proposes Nareg Kalenderian, KeelWorks founder and game director, who contributed across *CYGNI* as art director and more. "When you're making movies, story is king. Everything else, like cinematography and camera and direction has to accompany that – accompany and serve the story. So we could take that to games, where gameplay is king, and everything else has to accompany that."

As such, KeelWorks approached the shmup genre with a slightly different mindset, where everything from the lighting to the effort of building the game world in 3D absolutely existed to support and serve the gameplay experience. And as it happened, looking back at all manner of different videogame genres guided *CYGNI*'s modernisation of its form.

"By approaching this from the visual effects and visual perspective that we came from, we started to look at these games – and troubleshooting the genre – differently," Nareg continues. "And we went back to the basics, funnily enough, because this wasn't just about being high-tech. We went back to the isometric days of the Nineties when

» [PC] A sense of gloom, mystery, and desperation is palpable in the narrative cutscenes.

» [PC] *CYGNI* is a long game for a shmup, and rarely lets up for a moment.

» [PC] *CYGNI* boasts a brilliant fusion of cutscenes and gameplay, which regularly merge.

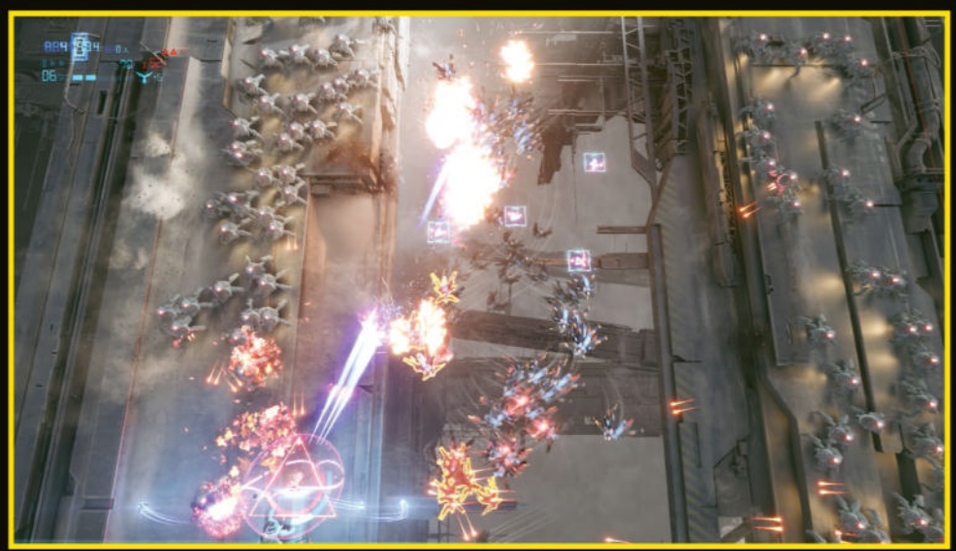
those games had pre-rendered backgrounds. They used to do a lot of cheating, so if you know *Commandos* or *Syndicate* or all those isometric games – they looked so beautiful because a lot of them were pre-rendered. So we used a lot of those same techniques, in order to make this feel the way it did. So even though the game is quote-unquote 'next gen' in terms of graphics and so on, there's a lot of very old methods used, and that we usually use in VFX as well – to make a shot work. Because in visual effects, it's the same story. You don't have much time, and you don't have as much budget as you could."

But again, as much as *CYGNI* is a modern – and very enjoyable – Euroshmup, that's not to say that Japan's arcades didn't shape the developer's creation. "We took a look at the genres," remembers Nareg. "We had the Japanese arcade shmups, and the Euroshmups. We decided what we liked from the Euroshmups, and what we liked from the Japanese side of the genre. We wanted to combine those two into something new. Obviously, that will create some controversy with the people familiar with the genre in some camps, and that's perfectly normal. That's something we don't mind at all. If we wanted to entirely avoid doing that, why bother with working on something different for two years?"

» [PC] *CYGNI* does explosions very, very well indeed. And there are a lot of them.

» [PC] The game's atmospheric lighting deserves much credit for the cinematic nature of the experience.

» [PC] Never quick to go down, the bosses are rather distinct in their genre.



» [PC] Even in the rare moments when the bullets quieten, there's often still a lot going on.

> "BY APPROACHING THIS FROM THE VISUAL EFFECTS AND VISUAL PERSPECTIVE THAT WE CAME FROM, WE STARTED TO LOOK AT THESE GAMES – AND TROUBLESHOOTING THE GENRE – DIFFERENTLY"
> NAREG KALENDERIAN

***CYGNI* did turn out to be a little divisive, in fact.** Many of the most devoted shmup players from the arcade tradition felt it was too disruptive; too divergent from the score-chasing, bullet-dodging form that is now the genre's active centre. Yet seemingly many more players – and particularly those who grew up on Euroshmups on systems like the Amiga – have been entirely enthralled by KeelWorks' offering, and thrilled to find a take on a shooter that brings so much atmosphere and feeling, all without punishing you for contact with just one enemy bullet. Though, it should be said, *CYGNI* still offers up a menacing challenge on all but the easiest setting; it might just be a little more fun than many of its arcade counterparts when you are overwhelmed and destroyed. Like the Euroshmups of old, *CYGNI* excels in bringing something more to experience than survival and score chasing; a game where player performance is not the only metric for enjoyment.

For KeelWorks, the next focus is on a *CYGNI* patch, to refine and iron out some creases, while improving the odd element, such as how the game explains the upgrade and customisation system. The team is already working hard on its next gaming project, and has more ideas and concepts for titles in the pipeline. The team might be relatively new to games, but having proven they know how to build something brilliant, they aren't going anywhere anytime soon.

What genre they focus on next – and how much it connects with gaming's past – remains a mystery. But there's a good chance it will bring something both familiar and distinct; a quality that was *CYGNI*'s greatest strength. ✱

Hardware Heaven

HyperScan

» **MANUFACTURER:** Mattel » **YEAR:** 2006 » **COST:** $69.99 (launch), £120+ (today, boxed), £50+ (today, unboxed)

Combining two things that kids love into a new, better thing is a sound strategy for business success – except, of course, when it isn't. Anyone looking for proof of how disastrous this can be should look to Mattel's HyperScan, which aimed to hook tweens with its combination of videogames and trading cards. Each HyperScan game has associated Intellicards that could be purchased in randomised booster packs, which the console recognises using the same RFID (radio-frequency identification) technology later employed by *Skylanders* and Nintendo's *Amiibos*. Once scanned, cards can grant players extra characters, power-ups and more.

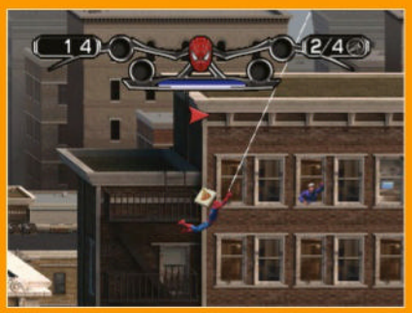
Despite hosting popular properties such as *X-Men*, *Ben 10* and *Marvel Heroes*, the HyperScan flopped hard. The hardware was cheap, but produced unimpressive graphics even compared to the handhelds of the day, and although the games retailed for $19.99, collecting complete sets of Intellicards could push the total price past that of full-price games on more mainstream consoles. Just five games were published before Mattel discontinued the system in 2007, with two planned games cancelled and two Intellicard expansion sets for released games left unreleased.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

HyperScan fact

■ The only HyperScan game not to be based on a licensed property is *Interstellar Wrestling League*, a 2D fighting game developed by Digital Eclipse.

PROCESSOR: 32-BIT SUNPLUS SPG290 SOC (108 MHZ),
STORAGE: RFID CARD (UP TO 96 BYTES PER CARD)
GRAPHICS: 640X480 RESOLUTION, UP TO 65,535 COLOURS, CHARACTER AND BITMAP MODES, HARDWARE MPEG-4/JPEG CODEC
MEDIA: CD-ROM (UP TO 650 MB)
AUDIO: 24-CHANNEL PCM
MEMORY: 16MB SDRAM



ESSENTIAL GAME

Spider-Man

To be honest, nothing in the HyperScan's minuscule library is worth writing home about. This film tie-in does feel competently developed and offers some variety within its platform beat-'em-up framework, so that's something. As well as thwarting robberies, battling bosses like the Green Goblin and rescuing Mary Jane, Spidey gets to deliver pizzas – making sure to change into his Peter Parker clothes first, naturally. You'll need the Spider-Man card to save your game, and the remaining cards are used to provide power-ups and unlock the various missions that the game offers.

MIKE TUCKER

Well known amongst retro enthusiasts for his work at Bitmap Bureau, on games like Xeno Crisis and Final Vendetta, Mike Tucker's background encompasses controversial classics, Flash smashes and chart-topping mobile games

Words by Mike Diver

Raised on BBC Micros, other home computers and Eighties arcade cabs, Mike Tucker's obsession with videogames flourished at an early age. His love of the medium developed into a desire to make his own games, but an abandoned text adventure project and unsatisfying computer science course left him disillusioned. He left college and went into game testing instead. He landed a position at Sales Curve Interactive (staff featured below), where his most notable project was *Carmageddon*, and years later caught the crest of a mobile gaming wave. When that bubble burst, he grabbed the opportunity to make his own stuff, ultimately leading to Bitmap Bureau's retro-styled successes.

What was your first experience with a videogame, Mike?
The first thing was a Grandstand *Scramble* desktop game, when I was six, which I was absolutely hooked on. I also remember playing *Xevious* and *Nemesis*, or *Gradius*, next to each other in a fish and chip shop in Cornwall. That would have been the mid-Eighties.

And what about computers?
We had BBC Micros at school – and I loved *Granny's Garden*. That was the one game we all got to play, and you'd hear the other kids talking about it in the queue for lunch, talking about the passwords. That game was legendary. I also got to play *Daredevil Dennis*. Of course, we weren't doing any coding back then, just learning how to use the computers.

Did you have a computer at home, and when did you realise that you could make your own games?
The first computer I owned was a ZX81 which I bought for four quid, but it didn't have a RAM pack or a cassette deck, so I couldn't really do anything with it. I'd sometimes take it to my friend's house and connect it to his cassette deck as his dad had a Spectrum. On the estate I lived on there were kids with various computers – my mate Adam had a Spectrum, my mate Pete had a Commodore 64, so I was always playing on their computers. And occasionally I'd see Adam's dad, Tony, who's now passed, programming a game from a magazine. He spent days inputting this game, and it was a real magical moment when he ran it.

And did seeing your friend's dad inputting that game spark something inside of you?
It sparked something for sure. When I was ten, mum and dad knew I was hooked on computers, so they decided to put themselves in a huge amount of debt and buy an Amstrad PC on purchase hire. That pushed me down the right path. I remember something called GEM Paint, which I used to create pixel art. I'd draw the bosses from *Nemesis* on there. And there was a 3D construction kit, this game creator, which I'd play around with, and also level editors. One game in particular, I think it was called *Willy The Worm*, a shareware game, had a really cool editor and you could throw loads of your own elements into it. So that was my grounding in games really, and my avenue into development.

What was the first game you programmed?
I think that was in QBasic, and I was trying to make a text adventure game. I thought, "How difficult could it be?" But I quickly ran out of memory and hit a brick wall. I lost confidence and left it there. I was 14 at the time. Following that I took up computer science at A-level where we had Acorn Archimedes computers. We did a bit of coding but it wasn't presented in a very fun way. We were playing around with Pascal, or C, and I felt like it wasn't for me – but I still knew that I wanted to work with videogames. I got a D, and nobody was telling me to go to university or anything, so I didn't know what to do.

But you loved games, so were fully set on doing something with them?
At college we had a *Street Fighter II* cabinet, *Champion Edition*, so every morning and lunchtime I'd be on that, and I'd say I mastered it to the point where I could complete the game without taking a hit. I knew I was good at games, and understood what made a fun game. I was reading *Edge* magazine at the time, and I saw an advert for games testers. I got an interview at

> I loved Granny's Garden. You'd hear the other kids talking about it, talking about the passwords. That game was legendary
>
> Mike Tucker

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **KINGDOM O' MAGIC** [1996] PC
- **GENDER WARS** [1996] PC
- **XS** [1996] PC
- **SWIV 3D** [1996] MULTIPLATFORM
- **CARMAGEDDON** [1997] PC
- **CARMAGEDDON II: CARPOCALYPSE NOW** [1998] PC
- **FRENZY!** [1998] PLAYSTATION
- **HOPKINS FBI** [1998] PC
- **LIVE WIRE!** [1999] PC, PLAYSTATION
- **STAMPEDE** [2000] PC, DREAMCAST (UNRELEASED)
- **GIANT KILLERS** [2000/01] PC, DREAMCAST
- **PUB POOL** [2003] MOBILE
- **TOMB RAIDER: THE OSIRIS CODE** [2003] MOBILE
- **TIGER WOODS PGA GOLF** [2004] MOBILE
- **TOMB RAIDER: QUEST FOR CINNABAR** [2004] MOBILE
- **BOMBOOZLE** [2008] BROWSER
- **TIME4CAT** [2009] BROWSER
- **KNIGHTFALL: DEATH AND TAXES** [2010] PC/MOBILE
- **HOUSE OF DEAD NINJAS** [2011] BROWSER
- **SUPER HOUSE OF DEAD NINJAS** [2013] PC
- **FATAL SMARTIES** [2016] MEGA DRIVE
- **88 HEROES** [2017] VARIOUS
- **XENO CRISIS** [2019] VARIOUS
- **BATTLE AXE** [2021] VARIOUS
- **FINAL VENDETTA** [2022] VARIOUS

» [Arcade] Mike was a big fan of *Street Fighter II*, which probably explains why so many of his later games are so combative.

» [PC] *Carmageddon* was one of the first games that Mike tested when he was working at SCi.

» [BBC Micro] Like a lot of school kids in the Eighties, Mike experienced the memorable *Granny's Garden*.

Sales Curve Interactive (SCi) in Southampton. I wasn't sure how to prepare, but I had a Japanese PlayStation and *Ridge Racer* was my favourite game, so I took in my memory card with my best times on it. It made them laugh, but it seemed to convince them that I was hardcore enough.

Your best-known project at SCi was inarguably *Carmageddon*, but you worked on some games before that. What was *Gender Wars* all about?

Oh my God, yeah. That was one of the games I had to test. I'd actually nearly quit in my first week, testing *Kingdom O' Magic* before that, but I was getting paid so I stuck it out. *Gender Wars* was an isometric strategy shooter, in a similar vein to *Syndicate*, with real slow, clunky gameplay. The concept is rather in the name – men are against women in this dystopian future where everyone is dressed up like space marines, armed to the teeth. It definitely wasn't PC, at all. And it wasn't a great game, but I tested that game for about six months, five days a week, eight hours per day.

» [BBC Micro] *Daredevil Dennis* would prove to be an inspiration of sorts for *House Of Dead Ninjas*.

And after *Gender Wars* came *Carmageddon*...

Yes, SCi was the publisher on that game, and we helped the developers, Stainless Games, on the production side of things. We tested it for about a year, including the eight-player LAN mode, which was amazing fun. I loved that so much. It was probably the highlight of my time in QA. Even the single-player mode in that game was excellent.

And what was the feeling in SCi when you were working on that game?

I could tell *Carmageddon* was going to be a hit within a minute or two of playing it. And with the controversy behind it, and the Pope calling for it to be banned (a silly story involving the MP Greg Pope, not the Pope), that was perfect publicity. But I actually had to demonstrate it to the British Board Of Film Classification, to show that it wasn't this ultra-violent and bloody thing. People were wary after the noise around *Mortal Kombat*, but the controversy did the game no harm at all and it was a great one to test. We also tested the sequel, *Carmageddon II: Carpocalypse Now*.

» [Dreamcast] *Stampede* was nearly complete before its publisher pulled the plug.

» [PC] *Carmageddon II* was another game Mike tested. It ramped up the visuals over the original game, and also the gore.

That was when SCi's operations moved to London after they'd closed their Southampton office, and I had to commute for about a year, which was hard work. It was three hours each way in the car, with my mate Stu. We'd arrive, play *Carmageddon II* for eight hours, and then spend another three hours driving home.

By the mid-Noughties you were developing mobile games, on behalf of some pretty big publishers, but what bridged the gap between SCi and that work?

When the Southampton branch of SCi got shut down, a lot of people got made redundant, but off the back of that there was a small studio that got set up called ioproductions. They were working on this sheep-herding game called *Stampede*. The idea came from the partner of one of the programmers, and the idea was unique at the time. It was supposed to come out for PC and Dreamcast and a deal had been signed with Infogrames, the big French publisher, so it was all looking good. I was brought in as production assistant in 1998, so I was finally able to move away from QA and help to shape the game. It was a weird game and its biggest flaw was having to control two characters separately, a farmer and a sheep dog. We spent a couple of years on it but Infogrames eventually pulled the plug because they said they had a competing project called *Sheep, Dog 'N' Wolf*, which was a *Looney Tunes*-inspired game. The project got shut down when it was 80 to 90 per cent complete, which was a shame. The company then pivoted to mobile games.

> "I could tell Carmageddon was going to be a hit within a minute or two of playing it"
> Mike Tucker

We're still a way off smartphones being a thing at this stage, so when you left the *Stampede* team to work on mobile games, what sort of games were they?

We're talking games for the Noikas like the 3210, not even colour screens, 96 by 65 pixels. The company rebranded as IOMO – IO Mobile. We were making simple stuff, but we were also one of the first to get into that space. We found success and had lots of contracts coming in. We were developing our own IP but also got to work with Core, EA and Disney, because they wanted their games on mobile. We did *Tiger Woods*, and that was a perfect fit, and a game called *Pub Pool* which was a huge hit. We put that on just about every phone you could imagine. This was the ringtone era, so we were selling games for between two and five pounds, something like that. I think we were Europe's top mobile studio for some time, and at one point we had five games in the mobile top ten and worked with people like MTV as well – we made a game for *Dirty Sanchez*, which won an award. I did years of that.

The money was obviously very decent, but was making these simple games really rewarding for you, creatively?

They were fun, and the money was good. These games really were my proper introduction to programming, and one of the guys there, Andy Bain, he sat me down one day and said, "Do you fancy trying to make a game?" So I made a text adventure for mobile, and this time it worked, so I'd come full circle really. That was in a language called Perl. Beyond that I was able to get my head around turn-based games, moving pieces around a board, games like *Sokoban*, I did a mobile version of that. It was a nice, smooth introduction into programming, building my skills with each game. After a while though I did get tired of it. The studio got bought out by some big American corporation who specialised in ringtones, and when record labels realised they could cut out the middleman with those sales, our parent company's value plummeted

» SCi created this promotional image for *Kingdom O' Magic*.

TUCKER'S TOP FIVE

Mike's personal highlights from his career so far

SWIV 3D

■ "Although I was largely a tester on this title, I was given the opportunity to help out with level designs on the expansion pack. That was my first 'peek behind the curtain', and my first creative contribution on a commercially released title, which meant a lot."

CARMAGEDDON

■ "My involvement here was as a tester, but it gave me a real buzz to be involved with such a high-profile title. I dodged as many pedestrians as I could when demonstrating it to the BBFC, but I think they saw through our ruse."

SUPER HOUSE OF DEAD NINJAS

■ "My first attempt at a platformer, this game was extremely well received and we've agreed a licensing deal with Warner to bring it back under the Bitmap Bureau banner, so we'll be looking to do something with it soon!"

XENO CRISIS

■ "I was extremely pleased with how *Xeno Crisis* turned out, especially on Mega Drive. It makes me happy to know that classic gameplay is still in demand, and I think we made a game that feels at home on the Mega Drive and many other retro systems."

FINAL VENDETTA

■ "I've long been a fan of beat-'em-ups, so I'm surprised it took me so long to make one, but we put together a great team for this one and the end result was very satisfying. We're looking forward to releasing it on Neo Geo soon!"

MIKE'S IOMO ADVENTURES

Some clever games from before the smartphone

■ We've mentioned several mobile games Mike's worked on across these pages, either as a designer, programmer or tester, but his credits in that field stretch on a long way. Here's a look at some of the titles he worked on at IOMO.

From 2002, *Scooby Doo! In Jeepers Creepers!* casts the player as three different members of the gang: Shaggy, Velma and Scooby himself. Solving all the required clues in a level naturally allows you to unmask the villain at the end – and yes, they'd have gotten away with it if it wasn't for you pesky, um, mobile players.

2003's *007 Hover Chase* was published by Vodaphone and finds James Bond participating in action-packed races played from a top-down perspective. It's based on the pre-title hovercraft sequence from *Die Another Day* and uses the engine from a previous IOMO racer, *Stuntman*.

Badger Bash, also from 2003, lives up to its title as the aim of the game is to whack the titular nuisances on their bonces when they invade your veggie allotment. The problem is that Gary, your pet cat, is also hanging about, and you wouldn't want to wallop him between the ears with a heavy garden tool, would you?

Pub Pool, *Pub Darts* and *Pub Fruity* rather speak for themselves, but *Pub Fight*? OK, perhaps you've got that one's beat-'em-up design worked out already, but the 2005 release definitely wasn't as straightforward as IOMO's other boozer-set games. You, as Terry the landlord, have to fight off drunkards, gangsters, disco dancers and more in a time-spanning experience set across four decades. No matter the era, you always begin at the urinal. Sensible: nobody likes being caught short mid-fisticuffs.

Finally, from 2004, *Tomb Raider: Elixir Of Life* is the third of three mobile games Mike worked on based on the adventures of Lara Croft. It's a side-scrolling game of fiendish puzzles spread across 15 levels, with its story following Lara as she survives traps inside a Scottish castle only to find the game's antagonist is a brain in a jar. Totally normal day for her, obviously.

» Members of the IOMO team on a reunion in 2019 (Mike, third from right).

» A photo of the Finblade team with Mike at the back.

> "We don't desperately need to do these other platforms for Xeno Crisis, but it's part of who we are"
> Mike Tucker

overnight and they started selling parts of the company, including us, so that studio shut down. We had another little upstart from that, called FinBlade, which was making early iPhone games and iPod Touch games, but I was getting pretty bored at that point. A year into that, the money just wasn't there and the company made redundancies, and it was at that point where I decided to start making my own stuff.

And that was in Flash at first, right?
Yeah, three of us made a little studio called Megadev, all working from home really, and we were making Flash games. We had a big hit with a match-3 puzzle game called *Bomboozle*, which I was pretty happy with. It got hundreds of millions of plays and brought in a few quid for us, and enabled us to get things started. From there we developed more Flash games, and the cash was always up and down.

One of your games, *Time4Cat*, was particularly inspirational, wasn't it?
So, the idea with that game was you have this cat and you move around the screen collecting food and dodging people, but the game only moves when you move. If you look at the *Superhot* Wikipedia page, it says that it was inspired by *Time4Cat*, so I thought that was nice. And that's a heck of a game, *Superhot*. I could never have made something like that.

So what was inspiring you, while you were making these Flash games?
I'd seen *Spelunky*. The concept of procedural generation appealed to me and I wondered if I could apply it to a platformer, and one day I came up with the idea of a game where you constantly move down through this tower, fighting through enemies. That was *House Of Dead Ninjas*. I wrote an email to Adult Swim, they loved the game and offered to buy the IP there and then. It was a bit foolish of us to sell the IP in retrospect, but it was good money so we went for it. The game was kind of inspired by *Daredevil Dennis*, really, the old BBC Micro game where you start at the top of the screen and work your way down. Adult Swim licensed *House Of Dead Ninjas* to other websites. It was the era of *Meat Boy* being a Flash game, before it became *Super Meat Boy*, so there was a lot of creativity in the space. It was a cool period to be working in, and we signed a multi-game deal with Adult Swim. They eventually asked for a sequel to *House Of Dead Ninjas*, which came out as *Super House Of Dead Ninjas*, and that was our first Steam game. There was quite a lot of pressure on us, but it was a real honour to be in that position as it was also Adult Swim's first Steam game. We expanded it for Steam and it got great reviews and sold loads. It set us on our way.

That almost takes us up to Bitmap Bureau – but can you tell us about *Fatal Smarties*, as that was the first game you specifically made, during a game jam, for the Mega Drive?
That's largely down to my colleague Matt Cope, who's a very smart guy and an excellent programmer, as he loves a technical challenge. He'd heard about the SGDK, a software development kit for the Mega Drive made by a guy called Stephane Dallongeville. It's a stepping stone into Mega Drive development that makes the process of putting a sprite

» [Browser] *Bomboozle* can still be played online today and is a fine way to waste ten minutes.

» [PC] Don't be fooled by the cute aesthetics. *Super House Of Dead Ninjas* is surprisingly bloody.

» [Mobile] *Pub Pool* is just one of the many mobile games Mike worked on.

» [PC] The enjoyable *Battle Axe* should be coming to Neo Geo and Mega Drive in the future.

» [PC] Henk Neiborg's amazing pixel art for *Battle Axe* really shines in its character select screen.

» [Mobile] Mike found himself working on numerous licensed mobile games like *007 Hover Chase*.

or tiles on the screen quite simple. We used that and in the space of 48 hours we'd made a simple side-scrolling shoot-'em-up, *Fatal Smarties*. We didn't win that competition, but we got a real buzz out of doing it. We thought we'd expand on it and make an actual, full-on commercial release.

***Xeno Crisis* has really been the breakout game for Bitmap Bureau, even though it wasn't the studio's first. Is that a game, like *Carmageddon*, that you knew was good straight away?**

Well, I made a prototype, just using rectangles moving around the screen, just to get the feel of it right, the pace, the speed of the bullets, the damage the player does, things like that. And it felt like something we could expand on – it already felt decent. We met our artist Henk Nieborg, and asked him if he wanted to help us make this *Alien*-themed Mega Drive game. He got back to us like, "Hell yeah." I didn't think this industry legend would join us just like that! But he did, and he did an incredible job, squeezing so much out of the Mega Drive.

And now *Xeno Crisis* is on all manner of platforms – it's gone way beyond the Mega Drive and modern systems.

Matt wants it on more and more platforms. Every platform is its own challenge. We've got several more lined up. We have Game Boy Advance coming next, and PlayStation is done – we just have to arrange the disc manufacturing. I think it'll be cool to get the game onto 20 platforms. Maybe we'll be on for a record. We don't desperately need to do these other platforms for *Xeno Crisis*, but it's part of who we are.

Your subsequent Bitmap Bureau releases, *Battle Axe* and *Final Vendetta*, didn't quite make the same splash as *Xeno Crisis*. They're clearly great games in and of themselves, but why do you think their profile's been smaller?

I think it's because we didn't hit the retro platforms with those games, which meant there wasn't so much buzz around them. There are retro-platform ports coming – we're aiming to get *Battle Axe* onto the Neo Geo and Mega Drive at some point, but *Final Vendetta* is the priority at the moment, and that'll come out for Neo Geo. Those were fun games to make, a lot of work. We probably should have gone straight into a *Xeno Crisis* sequel, perhaps that'd have been the smart thing to do, but that's always an option. We will do a *Xeno Crisis* sequel eventually, but I like to jump around genres and try different things.

» [PC] Naturally, when you see a phone box in *Final Vendetta*, the next move is to smash it up and see what's inside

» [Vita] Towards the end of *Xeno Crisis*, the environments don't look very sci-fi at all.

THE MANY INCARNATIONS OF XENO CRISIS

It's on damn-near everything

■ Bitmap Bureau's best-known game to date is undeniably the *Smash TV* and *Aliens*-inspired *Xeno Crisis*, a top-down twin-stick-styled shooter developed for the Mega Drive and released in October 2019. Available on cartridge, packed inside an authentic-looking case, it was an instant hit with collectors of Sega's 16-bit system. But smartly, Bitmap Bureau didn't limit its astoundingly tough-to-beat baby to the old-school console, as it was released for PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One and Nintendo Switch around the same time. Arguably, these were better ways to play the game, given the dual-stick set-up of their controllers – but no doubt Sega purists will argue otherwise. After these 2019 releases came Evercade, Dreamcast and Vita in 2020, Neo Geo and Neo Geo CD in 2021, Nintendo 64 and GameCube in 2023, and Super Nintendo in April 2024. Mike teased several further platforms beyond Game Boy Advance and PlayStation when we spoke to him – we'll leave it to you to do the math on those, knowing that for this studio and its breakout game, the sentiment seems to be that life is short, so play more.

1P
4

One Piece Grand Battle: Swan Colosseum

GRAND SCALE, POCKET SIZE

RETROREVIVAL

» WONDERSWAN COLOR » 2002 » DIMPS

***One Piece* has been a popular manga and anime series for over 25 years now, but I'm not a fan and I know I'll never become one.** It's not that the adventures of the Straw Hat Pirates hold no appeal to me, it's just that I'd have over 1,100 episodes to catch up on if I started the anime series today, and I find that kind of time commitment to be daunting. Even so, my unfamiliarity with Luffy and pals is no barrier to interest in their licensed games.

One Piece Grand Battle: Swan Colosseum is a fighting game that feels like a hybrid of *Super Smash Bros* and more traditional fighters. Battles take place in arenas with platforms to jump on and items to grab, but the fights are strictly one-on-one affairs and victory is achieved by depleting your opponent's life bar. It's really easy to get into as moves are simple to pull off, each using just a single direction and the B button, apart from the Super Moves that use both A and B. It's quite an attractive game too, with colourful backgrounds and fluidly animated sprites that serve as a reminder of the WonderSwan Color's capabilities – in fact, some of the graphics were later reused in a Game Boy Advance *One Piece* game. The audio is unfortunately a reminder of the WonderSwan's limitations, but we won't hold that against it.

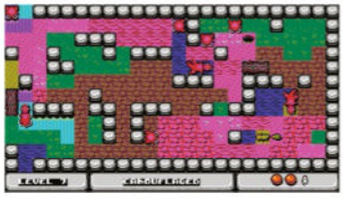
Although the Event Mode text is naturally all in Japanese, it does offer plenty to do as each character has a different story and you can unlock Wanted posters by meeting certain conditions, such as finishing the story without using continues. Some of those posters unlock further characters and stages, so they're worth the effort. If you're a newcomer to the world of the WonderSwan and you're looking for something that doesn't require much Japanese ability, *One Piece Grand Battle: Swan Colosseum* should be on your shopping list.

>> UFO 50 has flown into our sights, and this retro compilation from an alternate world is well worth catching. Over the page, we check out Zelda's solo adventure, the latest Evercade carts from Blaze, and a brand-new book about the Game Boy

» [PC] In *Rail Heist*, you work against the lawmen in alternating turns to rob trains.

UFO 50

UNBELIEVABLY FUN OBJECT



» [PC] Frogs, crocodiles and more imperil the titular Chameleon in a very tricky puzzler.

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £20.99
- **PUBLISHER:** MOSSMOUTH
- **DEVELOPER:** MOSSMOUTH
- **BUY IT FROM:** STEAM
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

As much as we know most UFO sightings are likely nothing more than regular things we've failed to identify, the term conjures up the mental image of aliens for us just as it likely does for you. *UFO 50* comes from another world, too – a world in which UFO Soft spent the Eighties creating a wide range of games for the LX console range, with 50 represented here from 1982 to 1989. Every game fits into this fictional framework, allowing you to trace the history of hardware upgrades, the careers of individual designers and even some short game series.

In reality these games are the work of developers behind indie hits like *Spelunky*, *Downwell* and *Catacomb Kids*, and have been designed with a shared retro aesthetic that aims to evoke the look and sound of the 8-bit age, deviating from the gameplay conventions of yesteryear and adding modern twists as the developers feel appropriate. *Paint Chase* is a great example of the approach taken – seeing cars in a maze immediately brings to mind *Head-On* and *Rally-X*, and the painting gameplay is straight out of *Crush Roller*, but the timed battles for territorial control bring to mind *Splatoon*. *UFO 50* also feels like a celebration

BRIEF HISTORY

» *UFO 50* is the brainchild of *Spelunky* developer Derek Yu and his friend Jon Perry, who collaborated on games as kids. The project was born from a desire to make smaller games, with the compilation format decided upon as it was felt that those smaller games wouldn't be viable as standalone releases. The team eventually grew to include a small band of collaborators, and although the game was first announced in 2017 for a 2018 release, it has taken until this year to complete. Console ports are also in the works.

» [PC] Bigger isn't necessarily better for the discs representing soldiers in *Lords Of Diskonia*, a strategy game.

» [PC] The fictional details for each game really add a sense of cohesion to the collection's library.

★PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

UFO 50

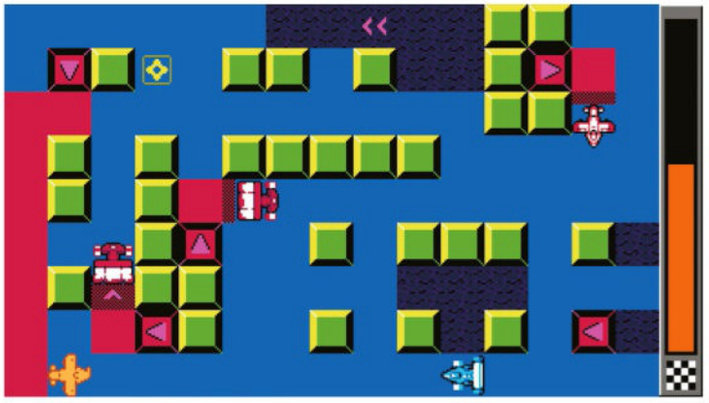
This is a truly astonishing collection of games and it's equally astonishing that they're being offered at such a low price. Do not sleep on this, it will keep you going for ages.

NICK

C-Smash VRS

The *New Dimension* update has opened up the fun to non-VR players, and the *Breakout*-via-squash action is compelling on a flat screen too.

» [PC] *Pingolf* was reputedly a favourite of convention audiences prior to *UFO 50*'s release.



» [PC] *Paint Chase* quickly ramps up in complexity, with boost pads and shifting maze layouts.

of the kind of oddities that were possible in an era before bloated budgets and shareholder expectations made videogames so conceptually conservative. To give an example let's take *Pingolf*, a golf game with pinball-style obstacles played from a side-on perspective – a premise that is instantly reminiscent of the 'golf plus other popular genre equals profit' logic that spawned Atari's *Ninja Golf* in the real world.

What's amazing is that all of the games have clearly been given plenty of care and attention. With 50 games in the collection, you'd expect that there might be a few obvious space fillers in there, but everything feels substantial, from the title screen to the credits. That's not to say that every game is gigantic in size, of course – we fell in love with *Hyper Contender*'s platform fighting and managed to beat it in fairly short order, but the game length isn't out of the ordinary for an actual 8-bit console game. Plus, it's one of the games that offers two-player action to extend its lifespan, with roughly half of the collection offering co-op or competitive play.

The developers at Mossmouth have realised that with no pre-existing favourites on offer as a real retro compilation would have, *UFO 50* needs to make navigating its daunting game selection easier with sorting and filtering options. You can follow the fictional chronology, go alphabetical, set favourites and filter for longer, shorter or multiplayer experiences. There's plenty of charm to the presentation too, digital dust being cleared from games as they're played, and games turning golden as they're beaten, for example.

Rather than taking any kind of structured approach, we recommend simply dipping in and out of games that have appealing descriptions until you find one you love. It's impossible to go into detail on all 50, but there are plenty of highlights. *Caramel Caramel* is a shoot-'em-up with a unique photography mechanic, *Ninpek* is a forced-scrolling platform action game reminiscent of Capcom's *Son Son*, *Chameleon* is a fiendish puzzle game in which you must camouflage a lizard and guide it to safety, and *Rail Heist* incorporates real-time and turn-based elements into a fantastic stealth platformer.

The success of *UFO 50*'s central conceit is evident in the way that we felt while exploring its library – discovering what the LX had to offer reminded us of the rush of discovery we experienced when retroactively working through the libraries of Japanese consoles we'd never received in the UK. It's unlikely that anybody will love everything that this collection has to offer, but everybody should find something that fits their tastes, and we'd be enormously surprised if anyone reading this magazine didn't find at least a few different games they really clicked with.

That's another thing about *UFO 50* – it's an astonishingly generous package. So many of its games would stand up perfectly well as individual releases, but they've been bundled together for a price that would be reasonable if you did only enjoy a few of its games. We think that you're very likely to enjoy considerably more than just a few though, and they definitely benefit from being presented from the unifying context of their fictional console. ✱

In a nutshell

There are plenty of games in *UFO 50* that would be revered today if they had seen cartridge releases in the Eighties – as a package, it's an exceptionally deep grab bag of delightful experiences inspired by the classics.

» Score **93%**

» [PC] *Magic Garden* is a single-screen arcade action game, in which you rescue jelly creatures.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

THREE WONDERS

▼ SOMETHING NEW

RETRO GAME CRUNCH

PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade Multi-Game Cartridges

» **System:** Evercade family » **Buy it for:** £17.99 each » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Although it feels like there has been a focus on hardware this year, Blaze has still managed to put out a fine collection of cartridges. The latest two are no different and consist of a selection of games from two respected developers of home computers – Thalamus and The Bitmap Brothers.

The *Bitmap Brothers Collection 2* may only consist of six games, but they're really entertaining ones. *Magic Pockets* and Gods are probably the weakest, but they're still plenty of fun to play. *Cadaver* and its expansion *The Payoff* are excellent adventure games, while *Z* is a wonderfully accessible real-time strategy game. That leaves *The Chaos Engine 2*, a slick run-and-gun that really comes alive when played on the Evercade VS, thanks to its focus on competitive, multiplayer play.

» Score **85%**

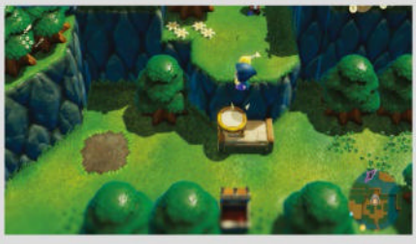
Thalamus Collection 1 ups the number of games to 11 and offers plenty of platforming and shoot-'em-up action. *Armalyte: Competition Edition* and *Hunter's Moon Remastered* are amazing shmups, while *Retrograde* is pretty decent as well. *Hawkeye* is a run-and-gun that looks amazing but is rather dull, while *Creatures 1* and *2* are enjoyable platformers. *Heatseeker* is the weakest game on the collection, while *Nobby The Aardvark* is also rather disappointing. Thankfully, we enjoyed the maze shenanigans of *Snare*. That leaves *Summer Camp*, a dull platformer and *Winter Camp*, a rather weak action game.

The emulation across both carts is very good, and there's decent in-game options as well. If you can only choose one, grab *The Bitmap Brothers Collection 2* as the overall quality of games is so much higher.

» Score **75%**

» [Evercade] *Z* is an excellent real-time strategy game that still holds up well today.

» [Evercade] It's nice to see Blaze include the 2018 update of *Hunter's Moon* on *Thalamus Collection 1*.



The Legend Of Zelda: Echoes Of Wisdom

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it for:** £49.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

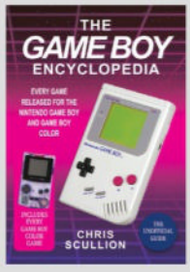
Hyrule is in trouble once again, and with Link having been sucked into a dark void, it's the turn of the titular princess to play the hero. The game plays much like the top-down *Zelda*s of old, but Zelda herself solves problems by cloning the objects she encounters throughout the game. Dungeon design lives up to the series' strong standard and allows for some level of improvisation, which is always welcome, and the miniature-style presentation is lovely if marred by inconsistent technical performance. It's just a shame that you occasionally have to dip into Link's bag of tricks, as finding alternative ways to win battles with Zelda's copying mechanic is challenging fun.

NICK THORPE

» Score **87%**

The Game Boy Encyclopedia

» **Buy it for:** £35
» **Buy it from:** pen-and-sword.co.uk



If you've read any of Chris Scullion's previous *Encyclopedias* you'll know exactly what you're getting with his latest book. While it's as well-written as any of Chris' previous works, it's the subject matter that causes this to disappoint slightly. The sheer number of Game Boy games covered means that the book relies heavily on the same four-games-per-page layout to cram everything in. It makes for a very bland-looking read, something that's further hampered by the Game Boy's own drab colour palette (thank goodness for the Game Boy Color section). The huge number of games included also means that many of the write-ups lack any real substance (we love the little facts, mind). Kudos to Chris for attempting such a gargantuan task, but if this tome is any indication of his planned PlayStation book, it might be better to split that one over two volumes.

DARRAN JONES

Cash Cow DX

» **System:** PC (version tested), Switch
» **Buy it for:** £5.99 » **Buy it from:** Online

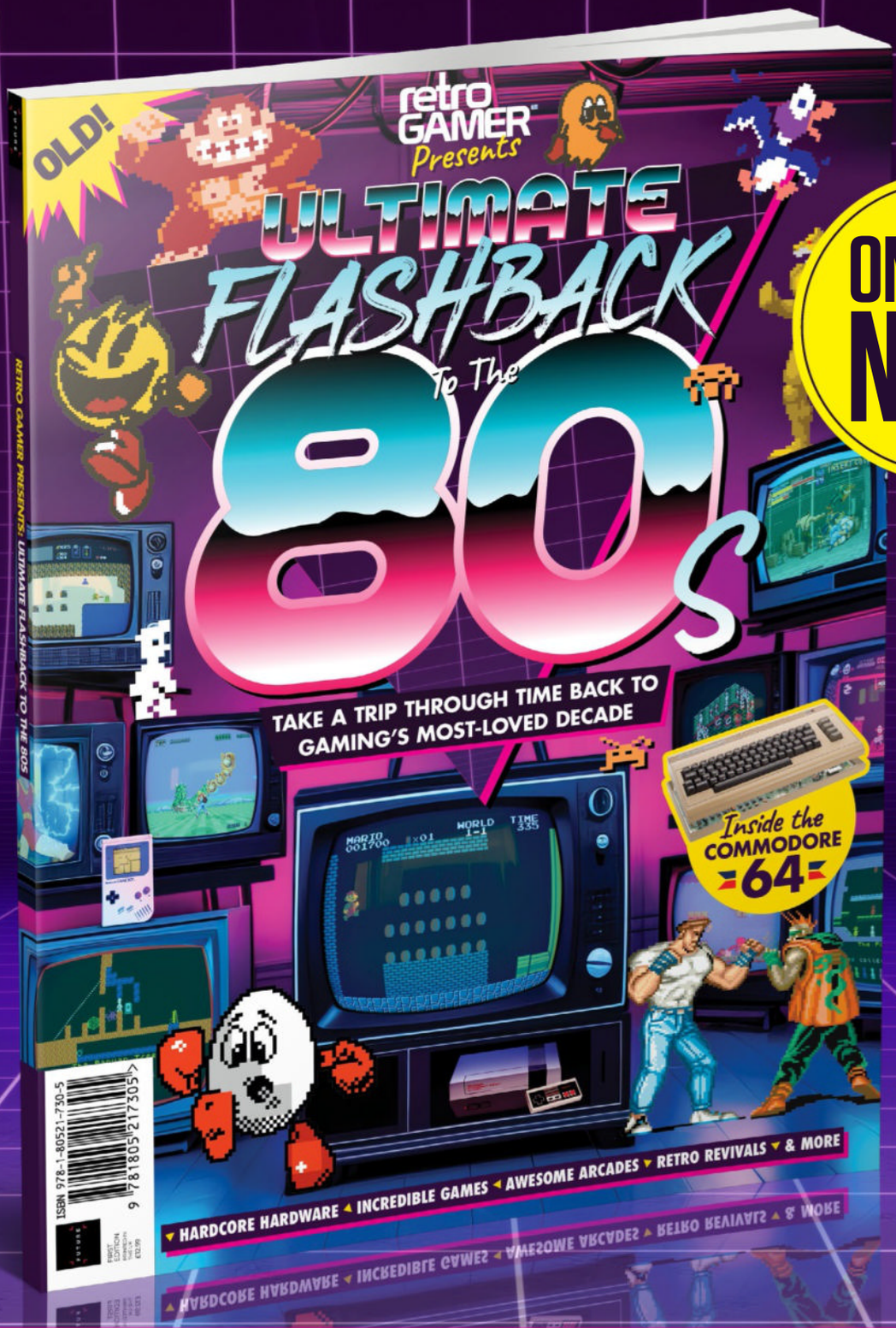
The developer of *Donut Dodo* is back with another early Eighties arcade-style platformer, with your job being to collect all the cash in short, scrolling platform stages that feature obstacles such as loops, spikes, slides and more. The more you can collect in a short time, the higher your score multiplier will rise, and you can push it further by collecting diamonds. Just like *Donut Dodo*, it looks and sounds authentic, but adding scrolling and vertical stage wrapping ramps up the difficulty – it'll take some time to nail down preferred routes through stages. It's a good game, but one for the dedicated.

NICK THORPE

» Score **80%**

GET READY TO HEAD ON A NOSTALGIC TRIP TO THE WORLD OF EIGHTIES VIDEOGAMING!

Prepare to head back to a time when pixels ruled the screens. Explore the games, machines, icons and much more that made this memorable decade so special in this time-bending bookazine from the makers of Retro Gamer


OLD!
retro GAMER Presents
ULTIMATE FLASHBACK To The 80s
TAKE A TRIP THROUGH TIME BACK TO GAMING'S MOST-LOVED DECADE
Inside the COMMODORE 64
HARDCORE HARDWARE ◂ INCREDIBLE GAMES ◂ AWESOME ARCADES ◂ RETRO REVIVALS ◂ & MORE
RETRO GAMER PRESENTS ULTIMATE FLASHBACK TO THE 80S
ISBN 978-1-80521-730-5
9 781805 217305

ON SALE NOW

FUTURE

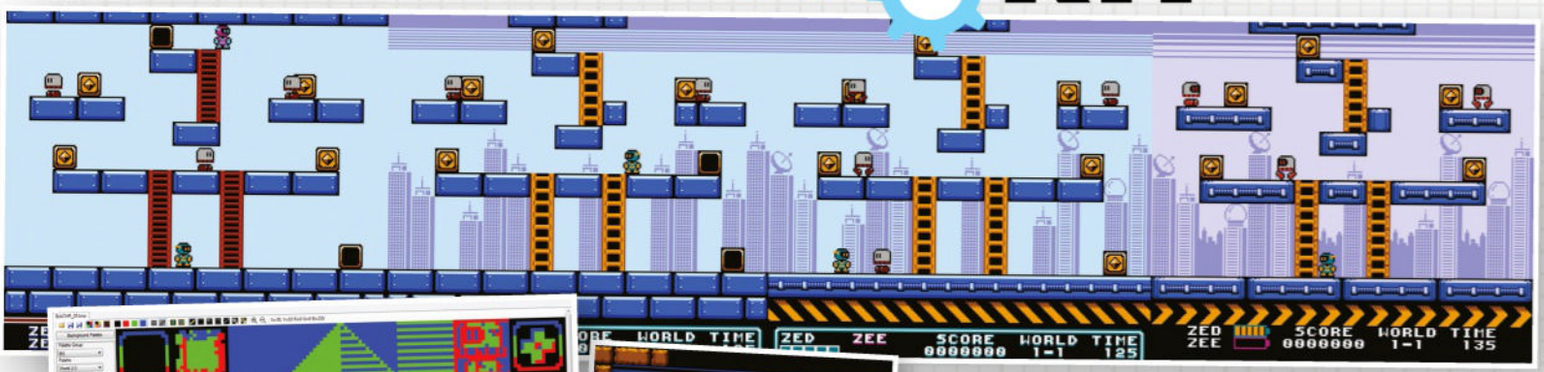
Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- EDITING GRAPHICS FOR ZED AND ZEE. --->

<!--- [NES] SHOWN ABOVE, THE EVOLVING BACKGROUND AND STATUS PANEL OF ZED AND ZEE'S FIRST LEVEL. --->

<!--- JEFF'S OLD LAPTOP. "I PICTURE THE 'I'M TIRED, BOSS' MEME EVERY TIME I FIRE IT UP," HE SAYS. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

TENGEN TAKE TWO

<INTRO> JEFF SILVERS TALKS ABOUT HOW HE REVIVED THE TENGEN GAMES NAME, STARTING WITH THE DEBUT NES TITLE ZED AND ZEE </INTRO>

<INTRO> THINGS HAVE BEEN BUSY FOR C64 OWNERS AT THE TIME OF WRITING. THIRTY-ONE GAMES ENTERED THE RESET 4K COMPETITION (BIT.LY/RESET4K-2024), AND THE BRILLIANT PAUL KOLLER RELEASED SPELUNKY64 – BIT.LY/SPELUNKY64 – WHICH DESERVES A FULLER REVIEW IN THE NEXT ISSUE. THIS TIME WE LOOK AT A REVIVED LABEL, A FASCINATING MULTI-PART VECTREX GAME, THREE GOOD GAMES GET REVIEWED AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO A NEW STE TITLE. </INTRO>

<!--- JEFF SILVERS HAS RECENTLY REVIVED TENGEN GAMES. --->

<BODY> **A casual conversation led to the resurrection of Tengen Games.** "Several years ago I was talking to a friend of mine about old videogame companies and mentioned off-hand how cool it would be if 'whoever owns Tengen now' would resurrect the brand," Jeff Silvers tells us. "In December 2022, I realised that nobody owned the trademark and that it had been legally abandoned for nearly two decades. *Zed And Zee* had been in production for a while by this point. I wanted to ensure I fully understood the process, and I filed my initial paperwork with the US Patent And Trademark Office in February 2023."

Paperwork filed, Jeff went back to his NES game. "As a child, I would draw little *Nintendo Power*-style maps of NES games I'd made up in my head, knowing nobody would ever actually get to play them," he explains. "The fact that I'm now producing games for my favourite console and reviving the name that inspired me to go for it is a dream come true."

The first game from the revived label has plenty of notable influences. "There's a lot of inspiration from fixed-screen arcade games like *Mario Bros* and *Bubble Bobble*," says Jeff. "I also noted how most levels in *Contra* gave the players multiple paths (usually high and low); it made the single-player game less linear and ensured both players in co-op mode had something to do. You can see that influence in most *Zed And Zee* levels." Capcom was also an inspiration, with Jeff telling us, "The *Mega Man* series informed the game's graphical theme of technology appearing in unexpected places (satellite dishes on top of ancient pyramids, a forest with USB cables as vines, etc)."

As for development, "Most of my work takes place on a 12-year-old Windows 7 laptop that's just begging to be retired," Jeff says with a grin. "I flash ROMs to a reusable demo cartridge when I need to test on real hardware, and I'll throw a ROM onto my Raspberry Pi

FROM A TO ZED

SIMULTANEOUS PLAY

<One or two players can take on Story Mode simultaneously, or two players can tackle the game's Battle Mode. />

BATTLE MODE

<Two players go head-to-head in Battle Mode, earning points for squashing the robots that fall into the chosen arena. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

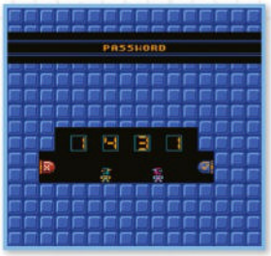
to playtest on a larger screen. I partnered with Dalyen Retro Games to handle cartridge production. Everything is just so premium and feels like something you could've pulled off the shelf at Toys R Us in the Eighties."

Jeff has big plans for Tengen's first release. "I'm currently exploring releasing *Zed And Zee* to current-gen platforms. I was approached about porting to Android and iOS. I turned that down because its gameplay doesn't translate well to touch-screens, but I'm considering how future games might be developed with that option in mind. There are some forgotten game series that I'd love to bring back in an official capacity. HAL, if you're reading this, I'll make an *Adventures Of Lolo* sequel for almost free. Hit me up. While we're at it, G-Mode, you should let me have a crack at a new *BurgerTime*. And Atari Interactive, even though they weren't involved with the original Tengen, a partnership with them would be pretty cool." </BODY>

<INTRO> FIVE KEY FEATURES OF ZED AND ZEE </INTRO>

MAPPED OUT

You can see your progress on the map screen, which also displays the password to resume at a later section. />

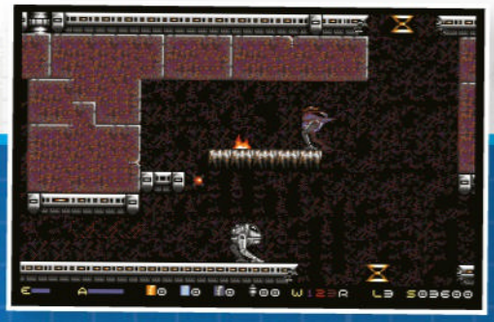


PASSWORD ENTRY

In a clever touch, passwords are entered by hitting the numbers from below and then selecting the tick to enter. />

BOSS FIGHTS

A large boss is trying to stop you at the end of each section – the first has spikes on its head! />



<!--- [ATARI STE] THE GORGEOUS DROID: SPECIAL EDITION SEES YOU HUNTING ENEMIES WHILE FINDING KEYCARDS AND WEAPONS. --->

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amiga: *Roguecraft*, which earned a Sizzler award in **RG**261, is now available digitally. Head on over to bit.ly/roguecraft-amiga />

Amstrad GX4000: Inspired by the *UFO Robot Grendizer* manga, *Goldorak* is a great vertically scrolling shmup. You can download it by visiting bit.ly/goldorak-gx4000 />

Atari STE: Junosix updated the classic coverdisk game *Droid* (above) with a Special Edition, which is also available for Amiga. Name you price and get it from bit.ly/droid-ste />

Game Boy Color: The beautiful *Excelsior: A Puzzle Exploration Game* from Polyducks launched a demo before its Kickstarter campaign. You'll find it at bit.ly/excelsior-gbc />

NES: *The Storied Sword* (previewed in **RG**247, reviewed in **RG**259) is now available as a physical cartridge. Visit bit.ly/storied-nes />

Various: In a very original concept by Snauts, *Grazers* sees the player protecting or hunting grazing animals. It's available now for ZX Spectrum (48K), C64, MSX, and Master System at bit.ly/grazers-multi

Super Moxio Bros, a collaboration between developer Tiny Bookshelf and artist 'Heart'-mox, pays tribute to the classic game's first level. See it in action at bit.ly/moxio-browser

Finally, Stefan Vogt's interactive horror adventure *The Ghosts Of Blackwood Manor* is available digitally and physically for multiple formats. There's more info at bit.ly/ghosts-multi />

ZX81: Jonathan Cauldwell's latest offering is *Getaway Driver*, a conversion of *Run Baby Run*. Name your price and download it from bit.ly/getaway-zx81 />

ZX Spectrum: Check out the cute platform adventure *Niko And The Magic Orb* from BTCO (bit.ly/niko-zx) or head out as daring adventurer Max Stone and discover the *Secret Of The Giant Pyramid* (maxstone-zx) – two titles created with Raúl Torralba's ZX Game Maker engine. />

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

CHAMPION CODER

JON DAY

<INTRO> GROWING UP IN THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS AND A CHILDHOOD SWISS HOLIDAY INSPIRED JON DAY'S ALPINE RESCUE </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: VIRGINIA, USA WEBSITE: RETROWORLDCHAMPS.COM FORMAT: VECTREX PREVIOUS GAME: NON-COMMERCIAL TRAINING GAMES FOR AVIATION & LAW ENFORCEMENT WORKING ON: ALPINE RESCUE />

WHAT IS YOUR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT?

<Malban's amazing VIDE which allows me to code, test, diagnose and benchmark all in one package. Assembly coders couldn't ask for a more robust and efficient tool. For art and sound, I have Adobe products and 3DS Max – and free tools like Blender and GIMP. />

<!--- JON DAY (@SHARESQUID) WITH HIS VECTREX RUNNING ALPINE RESCUE AND A PROMO POSTER FOR THE GAME. --->

CAN YOU DESCRIBE ALPINE RESCUE'S LEVELS?

<The demoscene mentality of pushing the hardware's limits merged with my desire to digitally recreate a snowy mountain experience. I hit upon the theme of mountain rescue in the face of an incoming blizzard; the game evolved into five distinct 'story beats'. />

WHAT ARE THEY?

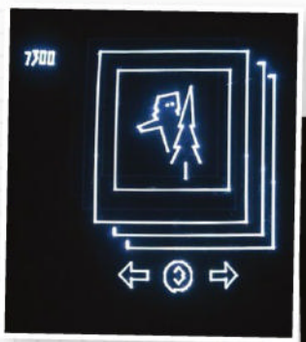
<"Mode 1: Snowmobile Race – Dodge obstacles and jump logs as you race the incoming blizzard. Find the letters "RESCUE" to locate the injured hiker.
Mode 2: Rappel Down The Cliff – Avoid falling icicles and spiked rocks to reach the injured hiker.
Mode 3: Helicopter Journey – Dodge birds as you navigate over mountainous terrain.
Mode 4: Helicopter Rescue – Fight fierce mountaintop winds as you lift the injured hiker out to sfety.
Mode 5: Airlift Hiker – Weave your way between birds and trees, over and under bridges as you rush through the canyon.". />

SOUNDS GREAT, WHEN CAN WE PLAY IT, JON?

<My goal is to launch the digital version before Christmas 2024, I'm hoping the digital purchases will provide the funding required to create physical cartridges. I plan to start programming another 6809-based system… my childhood Tandy Color Computer 2 (Dragon 32 in the UK) The challenge of porting *Alpine Rescue* to a raster-based computer is pretty tempting. />

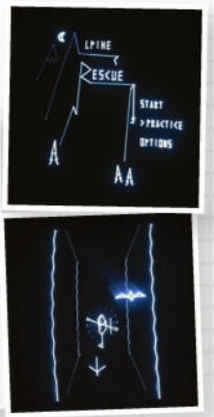
DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS FOR VECTREX BEGINNERS?

<Comment your code, your future self will thank you! Get into the habit of making backups on another drive or in the cloud. Don't use the Vectrex's built-in bios Random subroutine. Shout-out to Kristof Tuts of Tutstronic for sharing this tip. Always use the appropriate exit when you enter a block of code. Be SUPER careful with stack calls and get plugged into vectorgaming.proboards.com />



<!--- [VECTREX] DURING MODE 1 (SNOWMOBILE RESCUE) YOU CAN TAKE PHOTOS OF WILDLIFE INCLUDING THE ELUSIVE YETI! --->

<!--- [VECTREX] WITH THE HIKER DANGLING FROM THE RESCUE HELICOPTER IN MODE 3, GATHER COINS AND LETTERS FOR EXTRA POINTS! --->



DATA BURST

CRATER SONG

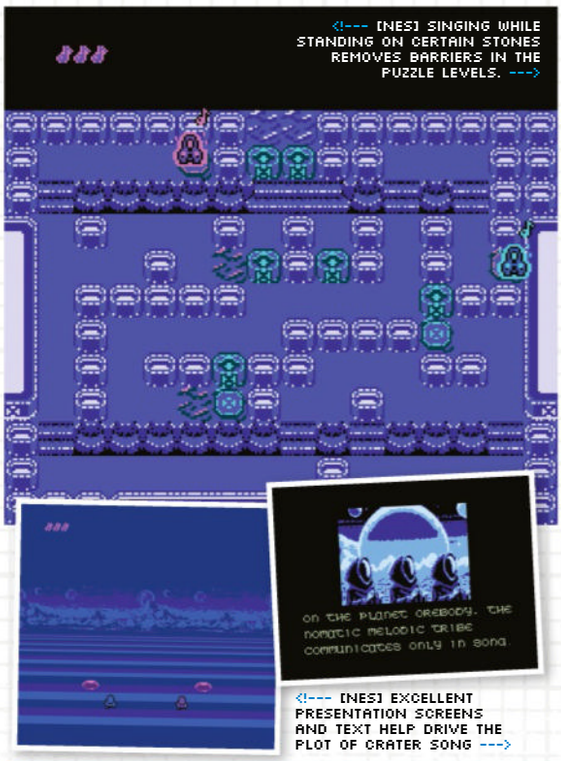
<INFO FORMAT: NES CREDITS: JOHN VANDERHOEF (DEVELOPER), JORDAN DAVIS (MUSIC, SOUND FX) PRICE: $9.99 DIGITAL DOWNLOAD / PHYSICAL TBC WEB: BIT.LY/CRATERSONG-NES />

<BODY> **The latest game set in John Vanderhoef's *Orebody* universe won the Best Narrative Award in the Byte Off IV competition for NESMaker games (see RG262).** Twins Arco and Minuette are born to the Melodic Tribe but are banished for being cursed, leading them to seek out the meteor at the heart of an ancient crater.

The game's unusual control method sees the player using two joypads held vertically (like Wiimotes) to control the twins simultaneously. In the *Space Harrier*-inspired levels, they must dodge enemies and 'sing' to remove obstacles. In the puzzle sections, they must avoid contact with enemies and sing while standing on the icons to remove the blocks in their path.

There is a main Story Mode of six levels (with the ability to continue at later levels you have reached) and a separate Challenge Mode to conquer. Cute graphics and atmospheric music really sell the idea, with clever presentation, including short rhyming texts and static images. Bonus content is available upon completing the game's modes. Orders for the physical cartridge were due to open on 16 September, but you can already try the digital download. Once you get used to the unusual control method, this is a brilliant mix of ideas with a compelling storyline to push you forward. </BODY>

SCORE: **88%**



<!--- [NES] SINGING WHILE STANDING ON CERTAIN STONES REMOVES BARRIERS IN THE PUZZLE LEVELS. --->

<!--- [NES] EXCELLENT PRESENTATION SCREENS AND TEXT HELP DRIVE THE PLOT OF CRATER SONG --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] LEVEL 1'S FIRE EFFECT IS NEAT, WITH SKELETONS AND DANGEROUS SPIRIT ENEMIES TO FIGHT OFF. --->

<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] IN-GAME DIALOGUE MOVES THE PLOT ALONG AS YOU FACE THE FIRST BOSS. --->

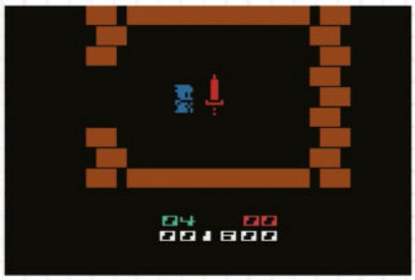
HAYATO'S JOURNEY

<INFO FORMAT: MEGA DRIVE CREDITS: MASTER LINKUEI (DEVELOPER), EDMO CALDAS (MUSIC) PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) WEB: BIT.LY/HAYATO-MEGADRIVE />

<BODY> **The first Mega Drive game developed with the Scorpion Engine is an unofficial follow-up to the Master System's *Kenseiden*.** Hayato, holder of the Sword Of The Dragon King, must use his powers to defeat the evil warlock Senensai who has kidnapped Hayato's beloved, Sakura. *Shinobi* fans will be right at home with the mix of platforming and swordplay, with hostages to rescue and extra weapons to pick up. Graphically there are some clever effects including fog/mist, along with impressively large bosses to defeat. There are graphical assets reused from famous Sega games, however. The soundtrack and presentation are excellent throughout, adding to the atmosphere, although tricky enemy placement makes some levels a challenge. Still, this is a good fan-made tribute to earlier games. </BODY>

SCORE: 80%

<!--- [ATARI 2600] THE DUNGEON MAP IS A CLEVER FEATURE TO INCLUDE. --->



<!--- [ATARI 2600] THE EAGLE SWORD HAS A LONGER REACH THAN THE BASIC DAGGER YOU START WITH. --->

ULTAR'S LAIR

<INFO FORMAT: ATARI 2600 (NTSC OPTIMISED) CREDITS: ONIRIC FACTOR PRICE: €8 DIGITAL/PHYSICAL TBC WEB: BIT.LY/ULTAR-2600 />

<BODY> **Jorge Romero's maze game was inspired by Nintendo's *The Legend Of Zelda*.** A lone hero must seek out the wizard Ultar by finding the key to the next dungeon and using items like magic boots, a protection ring and various swords to fend off enemies. Cleverly, pressing the Select switch displays a map of the current dungeon, although technical limits mean only one enemy is in each room. Still, with new enemy types added and increasingly complex mazes to explore, this is a fun 2600 game to play and one that will hopefully get a physical cartridge in the future. </BODY>

SCORE: 81%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> JONATHAN THOMAS IS DEVELOPING FASTER – A 50FPS RACING GAME FOR THE ATARI STE </INTRO>

<BODY> **A simple question started Jonathan Thomas' new project.** "I was working as a commercial software developer. I'd created a fully 3D version of *Pole Position* for PC but found myself wondering whether the reverse-engineered code I'd written could run on the humbler ST. Masteries (the author of the *Metal Slug* remake for STE) felt the machine should be capable of a 2.5D racing game running at 50," explains Jonathan. From the screenshots we've seen on X/Twitter (@RetroRacing) development is going very well.

The minimum requirement will be an STE with 1MB of memory. "STFM models will unfortunately not be supported, as the game heavily uses additional hardware in the STE," Jonathan says. "I develop on a MacBook and use a variety of open-source tools, including the Beyond Brown C cross-compiler, the VASM assembler, PHP (for graphics conversion, compiled sprite generation and lookup table generation) and GIMP (for graphics manipulation). I hope to release an initial version around December 2024 as a free download. Further updates may follow with incremental improvements, bugfixes and new features."

Expect a review in a later issue. </BODY>

<!--- [ATARI STE] WITH STRONG ECHOES OF KONAMI'S WEC LE MANS, FASTER USES CHANGING LIGHT CONDITIONS TO PORTRAY DIFFERENT TIMES OF THE DAY. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [GameCube] *Rebel Strike* was disappointing, but it did contain unlockable ports of Atari's classic *Star Wars* arcade games.

CELEBRATING FACTOR 5

The team discuss what gave Factor 5's games their appeal

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

After making its name with astonishing-looking Amiga and Atari ST games, Factor 5 soon moved over to consoles and found great success, before winding down in 2011. It's since been resurrected, but the team are focussing on those earlier years.

DARRAN
So what's the first Factor 5 game you remember playing?

TIM
It was *Katakis* on the Amiga and I flipping loved it, possibly more than *R-Type*, even though it's a bit of a rip-off.

NICK
I think it was *BC Kid*, the Amiga version of *Bonk's Adventure*, at the local play scheme. I quite liked it but it was very rarely ever played, most of the other kids seemed to prefer *Sleepwalker*.

DARRAN
I think *R-Type* on the Amiga was the first game I played and I remember being impressed with it. *Turrican II: The Final Fight* was really good as well. What do you think made its earlier 16-bit games stand out?

TIM
Speed and graphics, especially when it comes to *Turrican*. That was amazing – jumping about, shooting everything and it felt like you could go anywhere.

NICK
Yeah, they definitely felt technically polished. Compared to the other Amiga games I saw back then, they really stood out.

DARRAN
Yeah, there's a technical proficiency to Factor 5's games that absolutely set the studio apart from others. I think this becomes even more noticeable when you look at its three SNES games. Did anyone play them?

TIM
Unfortunately not as I never owned a SNES, *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures* looks kind of good. Wouldn't have minded a go on *Super Turrican* as well.

NICK
I didn't play those until I started on **Retro Gamer**, but I had a great time with them when the Analogue Super NT came in for review. I did play *Mega Turrican* a bit, though, which I thought was impressive.

DARRAN
I have a weird relationship with *Indiana Jones*. It looks absolutely incredible and has some great use of Mode 7, but I find it a little clunky to play, which puts me off buying it. I actually picked up the reissue of *Super Turrican 2* from Strictly Limited Games and that's quite spectacular. Did anyone get to play Factor 5's N64 games?

NICK
Yeah, *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* came around shortly before I had my first *Star Wars* experience with *Episode I*, so I ended up curious about it. I think I have better memories of the game than the film.

TIM
Not really, just a brief go on *Star Wars Episode I: Battle for Naboo*, I'd already been soured by the film though.

DARRAN
I love *Rogue Squadron* and would really like to play *Battle For Naboo*, but it's quite expensive now. Speaking of which, the fact that Factor 5 was able to sneak the Naboo Starfighter into *Rogue Leader* and no one knew about it was quite amazing at the time. *Infernal Machine* is my favourite. It cost me a fortune and it's buggy as hell, but the sheer ambition of that game is incredible. Does anyone have any other games they want to discuss before we move over to the GameCube era?

> "Wasn't Rogue Squadron III the one with the disco-dancing sequence at the beginning?"
> DARRAN JONES

» [PlayStation 3] It's unclear how much motion controls were demanded by Sony, but it is clear that it wasn't a great idea for *Lair*.

» [SNES] Factor 5 had a good relationship with LucasArts, which led to *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures* and numerous *Star Wars* games.

NICK

Factor 5 did some good conversion work, and I need to mention the really impressive Game Boy version of *Contra: The Alien Wars*. Also its sound technology in the N64 era was a part of a lot of really good games, particularly the *Pokémon Stadium* games.

DARRAN

Agreed, it did some really impressive magic there. Factor 5 also did the sound for *Resident Evil 2* as well on the N64.

TIM

I'd not long started on *Cube* when *Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike* came out. It looked amazing, never got to play it though, just watched Chandra playing it until he gurned at me for lurking.

DARRAN

Wasn't *Rogue Squadron III* the one with the disco-dancing sequence at the beginning?

NICK

That's right. When I think of *Rebel Strike*, I think about how crazy it was that Factor 5 managed to cram most of *Rogue Leader* in as a bonus split-screen co-op mode. That felt like witchcraft.

DARRAN

I didn't really rate the on-foot sections in that game, but the rest was great. We're getting ahead of ourselves though. Did *Rogue Leader II* convince you to buy a GameCube? It did for me.

NICK

I was leaning towards the GameCube since that seemed to be Sonic's new home, but *Rogue Leader* did a lot to convince me of the system's power – in fact, I don't think much topped it visually over the console's life.

» [PC] *Rogue Squadron* was a big success for Factor 5? After all, who doesn't want to take down the Empire?

DARRAN

Yup, it's just an astonishing -looking game if I'm honest.

TIM

So then Factor 5 had a massive break, and everything came crashing down with *Lair*. I played it at the preview stage and while it looked great, the motion controls totally ruined it. I would like to have played it after it was patched, but it was a bit of a disaster and didn't review well at all.

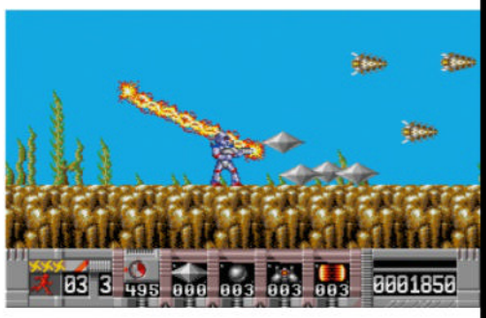
NICK

I totally missed out on *Lair*, but I never felt like I was missing much. I remember there was a bit of a stink about a review guide at the time, and suggestions that reviewers were somehow not getting it. I kind of wish the Wii version of the *Rogue Squadron* trilogy had come out instead.

DARRAN

Lair was a bit of a bum note to end on but the patch did greatly improve it. Still, at least we've now got the *Turrican* compilations to enjoy.

» [GameCube] *Rogue Leader* was a dazzling achievement on GameCube and was one of the system's best launch games.



» [Mega Drive] Although *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures* stumbled at the last hurdle, *Mega Turrican* did receive a release on Sega's Mega Drive.

» [Switch] Factor 5 was recently resurrected by Julian Eggebrecht and its *Turrican* series is easily available on modern systems.

READER'S REACT

Readers share their favourite games by Factor 5

Orange Caution
As much as I love the *Rogue Squadron* games, *Turrican* is my favourite. Fast, fluid, original and just a blast to play, especially with that pumping soundtrack.

Mr Pixel Ninja
I thought *BC Kid* (*Bonk's Adventure*) for the Amiga was a pretty top-notch conversion.

Jason
Has to be *Rogue Squadron II* for me. It made buying a GameCube on launch almost a necessity. From the opening moments you knew it was something really special.

MMulla
Turrican II: The Final Fight. Surely this was Factor 5's crowning glory? It's still supremely playable even to this day.

Thomas Touzimsky
Turrican II on the Amiga has burnt itself into my memory forever. I can still find my way around its giant maps even today, and its excellent soundtrack lives rent-free in my head.

Ty Davies
Most will say the work on *Star Wars* for sure but I love *Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures*. They took the *Star Wars* template, did the expected Factor 5 polish, creating something really special in the process. The music and presentation was pitch perfect for an Indiana Jones fan and it has some really great gameplay.

Darryl Leech
Rogue Squadron on the N64.

Titanic Toddler
Mega Turrican on the Genesis/Mega Drive. It's an absolute tour-de-force of action and music. I know it lacks some of the exploration elements of the other *Turrican* games, but it trades it for non-stop action rivalled only by *Contra: Hard Corps*.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

JUNGLE GREEN N64 (DONKEY KONG N64 SET)

"I remember opening this present up on Christmas morning and immediately fell in love with videogames. This is the system that started everything. It really shaped my love for gaming and grew my passion for it.

PAID: FREE

MARIO DIMENSIONAL STATUE

"I saw this statue at a local toy store and jokingly asked the owner if it was for sale. He said yes! Mario was loaded up in the backseat of the car and made the road trip back home."

PAID: $1750

THE N64,000-DOLLAR QUESTION

Brandi Ahmer has an Ultra Nintendo collection

BIO

NAME:
Brandi Ahmer AKA Gamer Ahmer

LOCATION:
Maryland, USA

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
$250,000+

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Nintendo 64

FAVOURITE GAME:
Mortal Kombat II

YOUTUBE:
YouTube.com/GamerAhmer

For Brandi Ahmer, AKA Gamer Ahmer, her love of videogame collecting started after experiencing a certain plumber for the first time. "I fell in love with gaming in the Nineties" Brandi recalls, "I remember first visiting my cousin's house and seeing everyone take turns playing the NES. I was fascinated with *Super Mario Bros* and patiently watched and waited until I got my chance to play. My parents eventually got me a Nintendo 64 for Christmas and I was hooked on gaming!"

It was after finishing her education that the collecting bug took hold. "I started collecting retro games when I graduated college and began my career. I remember stumbling into a videogame booth at a flea market and the memories came flooding back. I wanted to replay and collect games from my childhood. It quickly took over and became a passion of mine."

Brandi's decision-making on what to collect began to mature as her collection started to grow. "As the years of collecting have continued, I am more selective in what I purchase. In the beginning, I wanted a bit of everything. Now I try to find those rare and hard-to-find items with significant history. I am constantly searching for items that surprise me."

She has also had some bargains and treasured items along the way. "There are so many bargains, where do I start?" she ponders. "I've found A World Of Nintendo fibre optic lighted sign, Hyundai Comboy Red N64 controller, Sega Genesis cabinets, *Clay Fighter: Sculptor's Cut* press kit, prototypes and more all local and cheap." But there is a particular bargain that stands out. "The best bargain must be my sealed *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* standee for the NES. The seller wanted $70 for it on Facebook Marketplace, and I've since been offered $10,000+ for it."

Although Brandi enjoys a wide range of consoles and games, one has captured her heart. "I've come to appreciate so many consoles and games because of the way they have shaped gaming over the years. Some of my favourites are the Super Nintendo, Nintendo, Sega Saturn, Sega Dreamcast, PlayStation 2 and Nintendo GameCube. However, my absolute favourite will always be the Nintendo 64. Seeing the graphics improve that much was mind-blowing as a kid. Everywhere I went I wanted to play the Nintendo 64 and couldn't wait for new games to come out. I have some of the best memories playing couch co-op on the Nintendo 64 with my friends and family that I will always cherish."

We also asked Brandi where her collecting may lead in the future. "There is still so much out there to discover," she says. "I'm currently going for a worldwide Nintendo 64 set of games with a few Japanese exclusives left until completion. I'm actively completing other complete libraries as well." This leads her to explain the ultimate grail items she wants to find. "I would love to find more display items. Those are always my favourites as they were meant to be destroyed. I'd love to find a Vectrex kiosk, a Sonic or Tails statue, or a Blockbuster *Pokémon Snap* kiosk."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

RED NINTENDO 64 LIGHTED STORE DISPLAY

"This was my first introduction to the display/kiosk/promotional world of videogames. Finding this in the original shipping box from Nintendo really fuelled the fire to find more of these rare items."

PAID: $600

N64/ GAMECUBE KAY BEE TOYS STORE DISPLAY CABINET

I saw a listing on Facebook Marketplace for a Nintendo Wii kiosk for sale. When I went to pick up that kiosk the seller said he had something else for me. He pulled back the sheet covering it up and my eyes lit up!"

PAID: $500

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SPROCKET (ROCKET: ROBOT ON WHEELS) NINTENDO 64 PROTOTYPE

■ I discovered this from another local collector. Fast-forward five years and he finally sold it to me. This is one of three verified prototypes and this one has the prototype artwork on the cartridge for Sprocket."

PAID: $3,000

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

SONIC GENERATIONS

You don't have to go fast to secure a copy of this great platformer. There is an abundance to purchase with used copies being **£5,** while those in good condition hit **£8.** Sealed copies can be found for about **£20.**

X-OUT

This one's price comes with some X-factor as complete boxed copies range from **£30** to **£60.** Although, you can get it cheaper by seeking out the *Power Up* compilation, or simply waiting for 2025's remaster.

SUPER TURRICAN 2

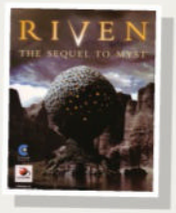
A loose cart of this PAL SNES game can go as low as **£20.** A complete copy can pass **£400.** The recent reissue by Strictly Limited Games is a better deal at **£50.**

WIZBALL

The Amstrad version is bouncing up in price with complete copies costing **£15.** Those wanting a bargain may wish to opt for *The Magnificent Seven* compilation which is a similar price.

RIVEN

This point-and-click adventure can be purchased for as little as **£4** for a loose disc copy. Those wanting a complete big box can still grab a bargain for under **£20.**



PROJECT EDEN

This action adventure title is just like many other PS2 games and shouldn't cost that much. Even mint copies can be found for under **£10** with rough copies costing **£2.50.**

SUPER SMASH TV

You can pick up a loose PAL cartridge for under **£20** with boxed copies for around **£40.** Want a mint copy? That is significantly higher with some selling for over **£100.** Just watch out for that thumb cramp!

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

This great action title costs about **£5** for either the PC or Xbox version, while mint copies shouldn't cost no more than **£10.** The 2009 HD update, Assault On Dark Athena is also under **£10.** That's a lot of Vin Diesel for very little money.

HOW MUCH?!

RANDNET STARTER SET

Have you ever wanted to go online with your N64? Well for just over **£2,800** you can thanks to the Randnet Starter Set. This particular lot also included most of the games for use with the N64 disk drive.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

BABY STEPS

David Crookes wonders what retro games his daughter will enjoy

Last year my wonderful wife and I levelled up. We became a mum and dad for the first time and welcomed a lovely daughter who has, over many months, introduced us to many real-time games. Many readers will know the kind. The stealth game in which you put a sleeping baby in a cot before trying to sneak away quietly without being usurped by a creaking floorboard. The puzzler that entails working out why the food you fed yesterday is kid kryptonite today. And the hidden objects game, usually looking for socks.

There have also been many adventures and lots of rhythm-based fun and we've been lucky in lots of ways. The difficulty setting of these baby-led games hasn't been particularly high but we're just waiting for that boss battle in a public place that we're sure is still to come.

We also know that our little girl will want to play videogames one day. Most children do and I've been pondering when and how we should introduce her to the retro variety. We're mindful the World Health Organization suggests waiting until at least three years old and we know face-to-face interactions are crucial for a child's development. Screen time limits of an hour each day also seems reasonable, but we're likely to wait for some time before thrusting a controller into her small hands. I'm still looking forward to those parent-child bonding sessions in front of a console or computer at some point.

It's no secret that I'm a big fan of the Oliver twins' *Dizzy* series. A month after our daughter was born, Darran expressed his amazement that we hadn't bought her a Dizzy plushie or mobile (news: we still haven't) but a *Dizzy* game could easily be a contender. The character is cute and his bouncy movements are sure to catch a child's eye. The fairytale-like locations are inviting and there's much to spark the imagination of a young mind.

I could imagine jointly trying to solve puzzles and engaging with the Yolkfolk. By extension, we could try the *Dizzy*-like *Spike In Transylvania*, *Slightly Magic* or *Seymour* games, eventually working through a host of cutesy Codies titles from *CJ's Elephant Antics* to *Steg The Slug*. But will these be beneficial? Do kids learn anything from playing games?

Research suggests games can be beneficial. A 2022 study of 2,200 children found gamers had more activity in the parts of the brain associated with attention and memory than non-gamers. The interactivity of games also makes them preferable to television and film with evidence they boost sensorimotor skills, speed up response times and stimulate creativity. But, as with anything, moderation is key. And, just as the Mayo Clinic says kids between two and five should be limited to an hour of high-quality programming, it'd be wise to pick the finest games.

Now, the Amstrad CPC 6128 is going to play a part in any future videogame experience and a quick look at Amstrad Action's top-rated games sees one title leaping out: *Playdays*, a game based on an old Children's BBC favourite. It's a tie-in collection of educational minigames which earned a stonking 94% so maybe that should actually be the first port of call.

> "Research suggests that games can be beneficial for kids"

But does that mean I should be taking a closer look at edutainment titles in general, maybe checking out Database Educational Software's *Fun School*? It ran for 14 years, with titles split across different age ranges, and had players finding moles, counting teddies and spelling words among many other things.

Trouble is, these aren't the classics of yesteryear that trip off the tongue. I could just as well find modern edutainment titles. I'm really after games that are simple, mind-stretching and showcase the historical highlights of gaming. They also need to be fun – take that away and the whole endeavour collapses.

To that end, perhaps *Tetris* can teach strategy, *Manic Miner* can teach risk-taking, and *Donkey Kong* can teach kids not to mess with giant gorillas, especially those chucking big barrels. Or maybe it's better to opt for PLAION's Atari 2600+ as an ideal introductory machine: *Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug* are engaging and appealing. The straightforward concepts and control of early console games are ideal too.

They could pave the way for the likes of *Bubble Bobble* and *Sonic The Hedgehog* in due course. But, ultimately, my work-in-progress list is about making each game count until the inevitable happens and she migrates to *Roblox* and *Minecraft*. For if she gets to that stage with knowledge of what came before and had some fun exploring, I'd chalk that up as a job well done. ✱

TITLES THAT TEACH

THE GAMES WHICH TAUGHT ME A THING OR TWO

THE OREGON TRAIL
I played the 1991 Macintosh version of this classic edutainment game and learned not to die of dysentery in the process.

PEUR SUR AMITYVILLE
Ubisoft's scary adventure game from 1987 motivated me to want to better understand French.

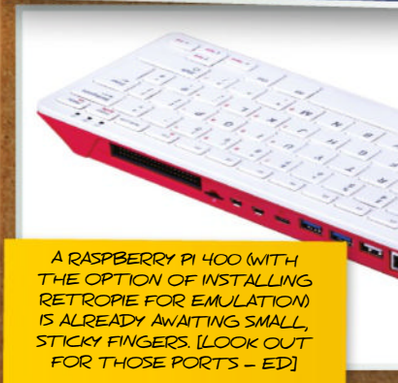
ELITE
I initially found it quite hard to get my head around *Elite* but it turned out to be a very good lesson in the art of perseverance.

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION
This game made history fun again at a time when my interest in the past was waning.

DALEY THOMPSON'S SUPERTEST
I learned if you want to get fit, breaking multiple joysticks wasn't the way to do it.

[AMSTRAD CPC] THE NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST SAYS NARRATIVE-LED GAMES ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO READ AND ENJOY STORIES.

[AMSTRAD CPC] IT'S A GOOD JOB PLAYDAYS' WHY BIRD LABELS THESE ANIMAL PICTURES!



A RASPBERRY PI 400 (WITH THE OPTION OF INSTALLING RETROPIE FOR EMULATION) IS ALREADY AWAITING SMALL, STICKY FINGERS. [LOOK OUT FOR THOSE PORTS – ED]

CODE THE CLASSICS VOLUME II
FOREWORD BY DR DAVID BRABEN
PERHAPS MY DAUGHTER WILL LEARN TO PROGRAM RETRO GAMES – INSPIRED BY CODE THE CLASSICS, A BOOK I CO-WROTE (PLUG, PLUG).
[WII U] THERE'S A STRONG CHANCE MY RETRO INFLUENCE WILL BE SHUNNED IN FAVOUR OF KIDS' FAVOURITE MINECRAFT.
ATARI 7800 VIDEO GAME CARTRIDGE
FOOD FIGHT
I'LL MAYBE PARK FOOD FIGHT – WE'RE SURE TO ENDURE MANY A REAL-TIME MEALTIME BATTLE.
[AMSTRAD CPC] FUN SCHOOL 2 DOESN'T SEEM MUCH FUN BUT IT'S EDUCATIONAL. WOULD KIDS LOVE IT, THOUGH?
[BBC MICRO] ONE OF MY VERY EARLY GAMING MEMORIES WAS PLAYING CHUCKIE EGG ON A BBC MICRO AT PRIMARY SCHOOL.
PAC-MAN IS AN AGE-OLD FAVOURITE THAT TEACHES THE VIRTUE OF KEEPING THINGS SIMPLE.
THE ATARI 2600. OFFERS SIMPLE YET INNOVATIVE GAMES WHICH SHOULD APPEAL TO YOUNG MINDS.

KID CLASSICS

Which retro games would be perfect to introduce to kids?

Manual Montoto
I introduced my daughter to videogames with some Atari 7800 titles: *Dig Dug*, *Food Fight*, *Ms Pac-Man* and *Xevious*.

Ben Magnet
Either *Super Mario World* or *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. Those two games perfectly encapsulated what the 16-bit era of videogames were and are easy to look at and play.

QuentinPSausages
Dizzy. It's simple and it doesn't rush you. You can take as much time as you like exploring and experimenting. The game doesn't punish exploration with fall damage or artificial time limits. The puzzles are logical and satisfying.

The Deviot
When my 17-year-old niece was two, I sat her down in front of *Smurf: Rescue In Gargamel's Castle* for the Atari 2600. She beat the first loop in two hours.

Rothenberger Paul
I would have to go for the age-old classic *Adventure*. Only three level settings but starts off nice and easy and is quite forgiving for kids, plus it's a very basic intro to dungeon crawling.

Todd Spatafore
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles – because life is hard and they should have been born earlier to play games they can actually beat.

AndyB
Ant Attack – the first isometric game I ever played and a ground-breaker for early ZX gaming.

Brian H
I always start with something basic but eye pleasing like *Super Mario Bros* or *Pac-Man* when I introduced my now grown-up children to videogames.

Mighty Andross 64
Super Mario World. Some kids love dinosaurs and I think they would enjoy riding the Yoshis around the levels and world map. Also the sense of discovery they could experience by forging their own way through the game.

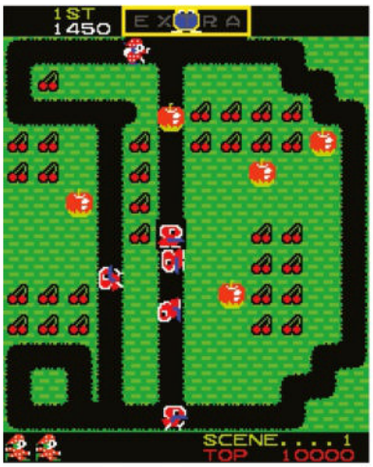
Jason
Bomberman. It's simplistic, a lot of fun, bright and colourful. I'm also pretty bad at it that my child can beat me more often than not too.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!



» [Arcade] How many cherries do you see? It's going to be more than Darran can count.

MR DOH!

Hi guys,

Long-time reader/ex-subscriber here. There's a wee bit of an error in your last issue, page 29 about the all-time classic *Mr Do!*; Darran mentions six cherries when it's clearly eight pictured, and if you reference *The Sound Of Music* song and the noises in your head for the cherries, it's clearly eight and not six.

Yours pedantically,

Mark

That's a very good spot, Mark. Darran's grasp of maths is clearly terrible and he was probably looking at the six cherries in the bottom-left corner of the image when he was writing about it. We may have to send him back to school.

STAR LETTER

WHERE'S OUTRUN 3?

Hey **Retro Gamer**,

Where on Earth is *OutRun 3*? It's obviously going to cost Sega some money to acquire the Ferrari licence again and you could argue that *OutRun 2* is a difficult game to top, but it seems baffling to me that we've not got a sniff of a new game yet. Ironically, I'm still playing *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* today thanks to all the clever wizardry that fans have been performing on the PC version, so Sega must be aware that there's still plenty of love for the series out there. Personally, I'd be more than happy with an updated version of *Coast 2 Coast* that's 4K compatible and has some new minigames thrown in, but *OutRun 3* is what I really yearn to play. Have you heard anything on the **Retro Gamer** grapevine?

Yours hopefully,

Paul Jenkins

» [PC] We'd love Sega to release a new *OutRun*, but at least the PC version of *Coast 2 Coast* is still well supported.

Thanks for writing in, Paul. Sadly, we've heard nothing on the Retro Gamer grapevine with regards to an *OutRun 3*, so your guess is as good as ours. We used to have a running joke with one of Sega's old PRs, where we'd always ask him when a remake of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was coming out. Looks like we're going to have to start asking about *OutRun 3* instead. Still, at least that PC update of *Coast 2 Coast* is rather nice. Have a book while you wait for more news.

SHED ENVY

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I saw a picture of Darran's gaming shed in the recent issue of the mag. I have my gaming stuff tucked away in a (albeit quite large) cupboard. Although it's a great stealth set up, it is a compromise as I share my house with my family.

I have often daydreamed about living the gaming shed dream, as Darran seems to be. It'd be great to have a space all of my own, but I worry about condensation, so, how does Darran keep his gaming collection dry and safe in his shed?

Kind Regards,

Chris Cheeseman

Thanks for writing in, Chris. Darran's shed is actually insulated to a decent degree. He does use a dehumidifier though, although even that didn't stop a scare recently when his roof started leaking! It looks like some small holes in the roof caused the leak.

» Inside Darran's gaming shed. Hopefully the recent leak has been fixed by his DIY skills…

» You can connect RJ Mikal to several systems, including the Amiga, Lynx and 3DO. Image: © Hunter Luisi and Burning Man.

TRACING HISTORY

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

Having backed a number of Kickstarters over the last few years, many have been geared around the Amiga. It occurred to me the other day though whilst reading some **Retro Gamer** articles about the Atari Lynx and the 3DO the links from those systems back to the Amiga development team. With that in mind, have you ever considered an article that traces the family tree of consoles and computers like this? It would be really interesting to hear from the people involved; what inspired them initially; what learnings they took from the previous hardware. Not everyone may realise the heritage of some of these systems, especially as they may come from different manufacturers.

Jon Woodley

What a fantastic idea, Jon. You're quite right that there's an interesting web of connectivity that ties a few people to very specific retro systems. The same can be true for games as well. It feels like this is something Nick or Paul Drury would love to sink their teeth into, so we'll let them do some digging.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag Retro Gamer Magazine @RetroGamerMag

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

MAX-IMUM HAPPINESS

Hi **Retro Gamer** team, I just wanted to say a huge thanks for the Switch and copy of *Sonic Superstars* we won in the competition you kindly ran in issue 253. It was kept under wraps for a while to completely surprise our son on his birthday (video attached!) – Max is delighted, and looking forward to exploring the retro delights on offer in the eShop (*SFII* being a particular favourite of his). Keep up the good work! Best Regards,
Shahin

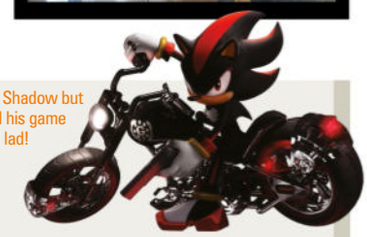
Awwww, that video was lovely, Shahin. We're so glad Max is enjoying his Switch and a big thanks to Sega again for donating it. If Max is looking for some cool stuff in the eShop, the *Sega Ages* range has some bangers in it and the games are regularly on sale. Enjoy.

» A Switch for your seventh birthday? We'd be smiling too, Max. Happy belated birthday.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Darran's dolls

Something recently snapped in Darran and he decided to sell off many of his rarer Game Boy Advance games. Did he put the cash towards more costly grails or perhaps another surprise holiday with his wife? No, he's spent it all on 1/6th-scale figures of classic movie characters like Neo, Leon and Darth Maul to name but a few. Needless to say he's not shut up about it, causing many raised eyebrows whenever he mentions them in the group chat.



» Darran isn't a fan of Shadow but Nick is. He completed his game 11 times. What a mad lad!

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Sonic The Hedgehog character?

Antony Longmore
Knuckles, because as a kid I always enjoyed rooting for the villain. He later became good and I loved playing as him in *Sonic 2*. It made the game more difficult

Jake
Sonic, Sonic.

Stuart Gipp
Rouge The Bat, because of her big sexy bat boobies. Please don't put this in the magazine.

Brian H
Dr Robotnik… he keeps Sonic in a job 100%.

Ravseig – Joao P
Shadow. I was 14 when *Sonic Adventure 2* came out, after some childhood years with the Mega Drive and Saturn titles. The taciturn hedgehog edgelord character resonated with early teen me, aided by impeccable character design. This has stuck with me ever since.

The Poppies
Metal Sonic, because he's able to copy Sonic's speed and power making for a better match up.

Jason
I'm going to have to say Big The Cat, because no one else will. And I just don't understand what is wrong with a large cat that just wants to hang out and fish with his hedgehog friend.

David Sheppard
As a massive fan of *Sonic The Comic* I have to go with Emperor Metallix. I thought Metal Sonic and Metal X were such a cool idea, and then *STC* took it further with the Metallix stories.

Lee Jackson
Tails. Somewhat influenced by an older brother always choosing Sonic, but they really grew on me. The sibling dynamic is relatable, they could do more than just run fast, and I loved the character design. Thirty years later and I still play as Tails first.

Robert August de Meijer
Tails let another play along without fear of dying. Every game should have this option!

Rev Phil Richardson
I think Robotnik is great. He's funny to look at, ostensibly evil but his worst crime is imprisoning animals in little robots so you never feel that angry with him.

CharmVersesEvil
Rouge. You know why.

retro GAMER

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Darran 'Super Turrican 2' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
0330 3906443
Art Editor **Andy 'Rogue Squadron' Salter**
Production Editor **Tim 'Katakis' Empey**
Features Editor **Nick 'Mega Turrican' Thorpe**
Photographer **Phil 'Super Turrican' Barker**
Group Art Director **Woz 'Rogue Squadron' Brown**
Editorial Director **Tony 'Rogue Leader' Mott**

Cover image
©Sega

Contributors
Writing Daryl Baxter, David Crookes, Mike Diver, Paul Drury, Andrew Fisher, Will Freeman, Faith Johnson, Paul Kautz, Iain Lee, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne, Graham Pembrey, Paul Rose

Design Ryan Robbins

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Director **Chris Mitchell**
chris.mitchell@futurenet.com
Account Director **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more contact us at **licensing@futurenet.com** or view our available content at **www.futurecontenthub.com** .
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

Subscriptions
Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
Subscription enquiries **www.mymagazine.co.uk/FAQ**
Online orders **magazinesdirect.com**
Consumer Revenues Director **Sharon Todd**

Subscription delays: Disruption issues are currently affecting UK and international delivery networks. Please allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery via help@magazinesdirect.com

Circulation
Circulation Manager **Matthew de Lima**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Advertising Production Coordinator **Emma Thomas**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Controller **Vivienne Calvert**

Management
Managing Director, Games and Ents **Matthew Pierce**
Global Art Director **Rodney Dive**
Commercial Finance Director **Tania Bruning**
SVP Consumer **Kevin Addley**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification and accreditation

All contents © 2024 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

ipso Regulated

Widely Recycled

RELIVE THE GLORY DAYS OF HANDHELD SUPREMACY

Celebrate portable pioneers such as the Microvision, Game & Watch and Game Boy to recent rogues like the Nintendo DS and PSP as you embark on a journey into the world of portable gaming! You might need a few AAs…

NEW
DISCOVER THE BEST PORTABLE RETRO CONSOLES EVER MADE
130
PAGES OF POCKET POWER
retro GAMER PRESENTS
THE HANDHELD GAMING COLLECTION
NINTENDO · SEGA · ATARI · SONY · NEO GEO & MORE!

ON SALE NOW

FUTURE

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

>>LOAD 266

nextmonth

ON SALE 21ST NOVEMBER 2024

20 YEARS OF WORLD OF WARCRAFT

WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES OF BLIZZARD'S EPIC MMORPG AND EXAMINE HOW IT HAS EVOLVED INTO ITS PRESENT FORM

AND MUCH MORE, INCLUDING...

Fairlight, Stunt Race FX, Exolon, Famicom Detective Club, Undeadline, Colin McRae Rally, Gimmick!, The Thing, Double Dragon Revive, Haunting Starring Polterguy, Xbox Debug Kit, Quickshot Python

The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay

A UNEXPECTED TREAT

» XBOX » 2004 » STARBREEZE STUDIOS/TIGON STUDIOS

When I started working on *games™*, one of the first big press trips I went on was to Stockholm. If memory recalls, the game I was going out there to write a preview about was Starbreeze's *Knights Of The Temple: Infernal Crusade*. However, there was also an opportunity to talk about Starbreeze's impressive motion-capture studio and I was particularly excited about it because one of the people working there had apparently been involved with *The Matrix*.

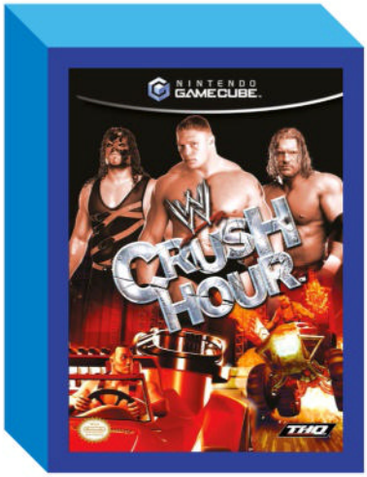
After being impressed by the sheer number of bicycles that seemed to outnumber the city's cars, I was equally bowled over by the motion-capture studio. Everything felt so professional and film-like and a world away from the previous jobs I used to do. I was in my element and eagerly watched actors reading out lines while holding fake guns and acting out a scene from Starbreeze's new project.

Everyone was very animated about this new venture but it was strictly under wraps and could not be discussed, despite how excited everyone clearly was about it. Anyway, I chatted to the developers over a pizza and headed back to Starbreeze where I was to be given a studio tour.

Once we headed back, I was proudly shown around the studio and got to see various interesting aspects of game development, including some of the earlier motion-capture footage being processed. As the tour continued I was ushered into a room filled with programmers who all turned as one to look at me. As I felt multiple sets of eyes bore into me a voice called out above the silence, "You can't be in here, I'm afraid." The PR chuckled nervously and ushered me out of the room, but it was too late, I'd seen everything. And that's how I first found out about *Escape From Butcher Bay*, a good number of months before it was officially announced.

012

ENDGAME



WWE CRUSH HOUR

» One night, a THQ producer wakes up in a cold sweat. "I know what would have made WCW's monster truck sumo match less stupid," he exclaims. "Guns!" And so *WWE Crush Hour* was born, allowing Hulk Hogan, The Big Show and all their mates to engage in vehicular violence. Let's see what happens at the end of this frankly insane spin-off...

01

» Vince McMahon has been defeated. In a surprise twist, his downfall was sealed by a heavily modified car in an arena of death, rather than the testimony of a former employee in court.

02

» This is of course major news, since billionaires tend not to suffer many major setbacks. With *Crush Hour* coming to a close, our stars are free to go back to their former roles.

03

» Not that those involve wrestling, mind. Rob Van Dam hurls a desk on *Wheel Of Fortune*, gutted that he couldn't get the target number of 420 when he finally got to play *Countdown*.

04

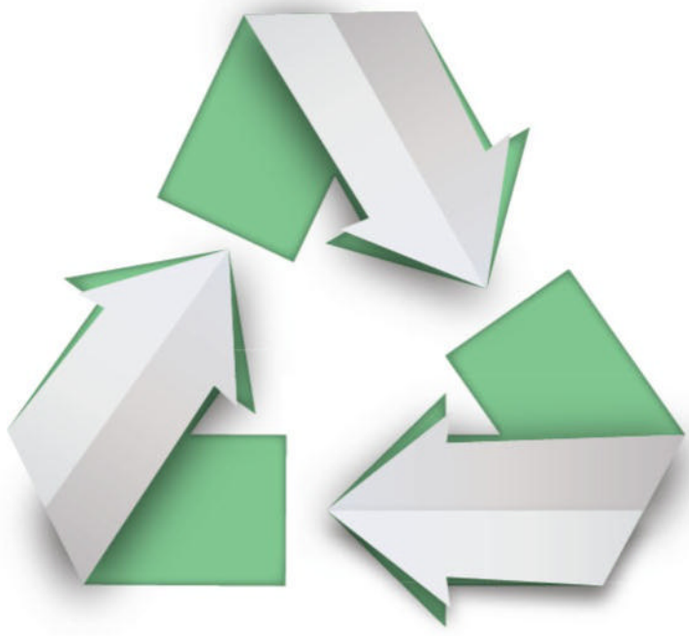
» Kane is back at the barbecue, which actually makes a bit more sense than poor old RVD's predicament. He'll certainly never have trouble lighting the thing, and he even has special coal. We're not so sure about the tricycle behind it, but hey – maybe there's a Little Red Machine.

05

» Meanwhile, Edge is totally confused by his role in a Japanese commercial. To be fair, we were all wondering what the heck was going on when he started feuding with Booker T over a Japanese shampoo ad as *Wrestlemania X8* approached, so this nonsense makes sense.

WIN A £50
NATIONAL BOOK TOKEN

We're giving away £7,500 to spend on books!
Scan the **QR code** or visit **lovepaper.org** to enter



PAPER REVOLUTION

71% of paper and 82% of paper-based packaging is recycled into new products; one of the highest recycling rates of any material in Europe!

Sources: Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI), 2021 and Eurostat, 2020.
Europe: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK.

Discover the story of paper
www.lovepaper.org
Scan for paper facts, activities, blogs and much more!

LOVE PAPER®
www.lovepaper.org

With thanks to
NATIONAL BOOK tokens

WANTED
SECOND HAND
win prizes
facebook

CHILLOUT GAMES

where gamers collect

www.chilloutgames.co.uk/Sell

Trustpilot

£££ paid for your games:

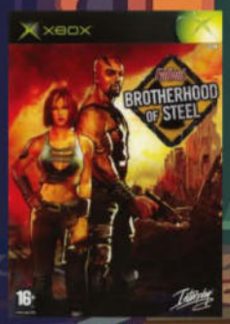
£119

£101

£81

£19

£88



£19

£139

£110

£13

FREE PARCELFORCE DOORSTEP COLLECTION

FAST PAYMENT

Prices valid 20/10/24 and subject to change daily. Prices are for PayPal (Shop Credit add 12% more)
Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd.
Full terms & conditions can be found at at www.chilloutgames.co.uk

9001

9000